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AFTER YEARS



A SEQUEL TO

"CUM ROCK"



AN ANXIOUS MOMENT.

Page 49.

AFTER YEARS:

A Story of Trials and Triumphs.

SEQUEL TO *CULM ROCK*.

BY

I. W. BRADLEY,

Author of "Culm Rock."

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AFTER YEARS.

CHAPTER I.

FACES OF OLD FRIENDS.

WHILE the morning mists were on the sea, and the great city lying at its edge still slumbered, the white wings of a vessel came in from oceanward, flitting between the anchored ships and the rocking buoys till it found its own place beside the long, dark, heavy-laden wharf. When the sun came up through the misty wastes, there it lay, the *White Gull*, a counterpart of its namesake, and waiting, we may surmise, for old friends of ours.

Not long after, the warm June sun shone brightly down on a group of persons just alighted from their carriages on the wharf,—

people whose faces may not be altogether unfamiliar to us.

The tall, grave man, whose hair has grown gray but little since last we saw him, is Richard Trafford. Noll, now somewhat taller, looks out of the same bright, happy eyes as ever; and the slightly bent figure behind them, with head glorious in a new turban, can be no other than Hagar.

The uneventful year which has elapsed since last we saw them has wrought little change in their appearance. Noll is Noll still; Trafford's face wears a calm, peaceful look, over all its graveness; and Hagar, good heart, has neither lost her wrinkles, gray wool, nor motherly expression of countenance.

And while they are waiting for the youthful skipper of the *Gull* to stow away their baggage, we will go back to the time when these friends were left at Culm Rock.

The closing paragraph of the previous volume refers to the fact that Culm Rock was not always Noll Trafford's home, but exchanged for a pleasanter one in Hastings. After Noll's return to his sorrowing uncle, no words can

describe the man's happiness. The old stone house was a joyful abode. The sorrow and shadows all fled from it. His gratitude for God's goodness in preserving this lad for him seemed boundless. It pervaded every thought; and when Noll eagerly proceeded to carry out the plans for the new school-house, he could not have found a more zealous helper than his uncle. You may well believe that when Noll saw the walls of the trim little building going up under John Sampson's efforts, and remembered what a change there had been in one year, he saw all things—even the melting of a most stubborn heart—possible with God.

The autumn was a long and pleasant one; and though Trafford proposed to spend the winter in Hastings for Noll's sake, the boy preferred to stay on the Rock. He could watch the progress of his former pupils under their new teacher, and in their light, airy school-room; and there was the pleasant company of the new teacher himself. But, above all, he was blessed with a new Uncle Richard, a man whose thoughts and emotions had undergone a most perfect change, and

whose life ran altogether in a new channel. There were no longer any dreary, silent evenings, with a grim man frowning at the fire; no lonesome afternoons with no one to speak to; no long strolls marred by the thought of a sad, sorrowful uncle sitting at home. And God had changed it all.

But when spring opened, and found the Culm school in a flourishing condition, with the people liking and respecting their new teacher, Trafford insisted that there was no longer any reason why Noll should stay on the Rock, and that he must no longer be kept an exile from friends, acquaintances, and dear associations. And with a great reluctance to leaving the Rock, yet with a strong longing for Hastings, Noll gave his consent to go. Mr. Gray, Noll's old friend, was written to, and the old house where the Traffords had lived for so many generations secured for a home. Noll could hardly wait when the news came that Mr. Gray had been successful in his purchase. Dirk Sharp and the fishermen were disconsolate.

"It be almost like lossin' ye in the sea

again," said Dirk, as Noll came down to bid him good-bye the night before departure.

"O Dirk!" said Noll, smiling; "not so bad as that. I shall see you again."

"The skipper say—an' the skipper wur the man fur a true word—that across the water there be sights we folk never dreamt on,—great housen, fine bits o' grass, an' trees an' the like," said Dirk. "Will ye ever be leavin' 'em fur this bit o' sand an' we? Think not, master."

But Noll eagerly protested against this decision.

"You will see me again in a year at least," he said; "for this is home for me too. Here are you all, and the school, and—why, Dirk, what are you thinking? I can't stay away longer than a year, possibly. And you'll hear from me often by the new *Gull*, and the time won't seem very long."

The year had flown swiftly away to the happy dwellers in the old home at Hastings, and we next see them, on this sunny June morning, embarking for the Rock, partly that Noll might keep his promise, and partly be-

cause both uncle and nephew found themselves longing for the dash of waves upon the beach, the quiet of the old stone house, and a look at the friendly faces that waited to welcome them.

The day was fair enough, and the breeze took them slowly out of the harbour, quickening as they came into the tumble of the ocean. Noll's eyes, alert for everything, followed the energetic movements of the old skipper's lithe brown sons with admiration; and his thoughts went at once back to the long-ago sad morning,—just such a morning as this,—when he saw Hastings sink and fade in the sea, and turned his eyes toward the waste of waves beyond which lay the mystery of his new home.

Now there was no Mr. Snape at the tiller, no Skipper Ben smoking comfortably among the bales and hogsheads; and even the planks of the *Gull* under his feet were not the same, he remembered. All had passed away, and here were Ben's boys stepping about in their brisk, independent way, bound to follow the sea all their lives, and likely enough to be

swallowed up by it at last, as their father and grandfathers had been before them.

Noll, remembering all that had passed since that first voyage on the *Gull*, could not but be conscious of the great joys which God had sent into his life. To be sure, there had been trials enough at the Rock ; but what were they compared with the pleasure and pleasantness that since had made all his days happy ? Just nothing, he thought ; and with some feeling in his heart that God was giving him too much, Noll went out to the well-grown lad by the tiller, held out his hand, and said,—

“Skipper Ben was a good friend of mine ; and we shall be good friends too—shan’t we ? The *Gull* and I are old friends, you know, and we are like to get pretty well acquainted before summer is gone. At what time do you think we’ll be at Culm ? ”

“About sundown, if the breeze holds,” replied this youthful Ben, pushing an empty bucket forward for Noll to sit upon. Noll sat down ; and soon the two were talking about the Culm folk,—the sailor glad enough

to find himself able to give his eager questioner pleasure by his stock of news.

Trafford came along the deck after a while and sat down not far away, his eyes resting on Noll with pleasure, and not quite able to repress a little sigh of gratification at the contrast between the two faces looking seaward. One, bronzed and browned with weather, a sort of sturdy good-nature and content stamped on the features, kept keen watch; beyond these expressions there was nothing,—no lighting up of the eyes when a cloud rose up like a train of horsemen with fluttering banners, no delight in the changing sea, no sympathy with the exclamations of wonder and pleasure that came from Noll's lips. Looking at the other face, warm, bright, and changing with emotions, there were pride and pleasure in Trafford's heart; remembering still that God looked upon their two souls with an impartial eye, and stripped of all outward adorning; yet glad and grateful that his boy's heart cherished nothing but good-will and kindness toward all His creatures. Noll brushed against all natures, and, in some way or another, got at the kind

side of them all, he thought. Remembering what the lad had done for him, and for the Culm folk and their children, and what a great place he filled in the hearts of unnumbered friends, Trafford wondered what the boy's future was to be, and who should be blessed with his good deeds and kind actions in days to come. God surely meant him to be a worker, since work he had been doing so long. In this manner Trafford dreamed of his boy's future, hoping he might live to see the happy days of which he dreamed, yet content with those he was now living; and the *Gull* dashed on, and noon and Hagar both made their presence known together. The wretched cooking advantages in the little cabin had taken no wrinkles out of the old housewife's face; and dinner, she declared, "was fit fur nuffin'." But the partakers seemed to think otherwise, and Hagar's heart was somewhat reassured at the sight of their appetites; and she went back into the cabin to groan and fan herself, and wish that by some miracle the ship might come to land at once. Hagar's soul, in spite of her strong faith in the Lord, was possessed

with a great horror of the sea. For her its sunshine and sparkle were only treachery; its calm and loveliness only a mask for the devouring jaws of death, ever ready to gulp down a life. Only for the sake of uncle and son would she ever set foot on anything less solid than *terra firma*. Her last words to some of her kin who had come to the kitchen door to bid her good-bye were,—

“’Spects ye’ll neber see dis chile agen, naburs. I’s gwine off to that drefful Rock, an’ only de Lord knows what’s goin’ to happen. Sumfin’ allus does happen; an’, ef it’s me, bress de Lord an’ t’ank him I didn’t gib up dem yer boys ob mine.”

But the voyage to Culm was as fair and favourable as heart could desire. The afternoon grew cool and lovely toward its close. The sea drew around its far edge faint bands of colour, melting into the blue of the sky above and the sea below; and the breeze that filled the sails lost none of its freshness.

Noll had found himself a seat with a comfortable look-out, and half sat, half lay against the bales, watching the vastness of the sea, the

dreamy lights on the far horizon, and keeping a vigilant eye for any point of blue land that might appear. It seemed a long time in coming; but at last waiting Hagar, down in the cabin, heard Noll's voice exclaim,—

“There!—look, Uncle Richard! I can see land with my naked eye—just over those barrels.”

Then she heard Trafford moving slowly across the deck to look too, and cried out, “Bress de Lord!”

Noll leaned over the rail, waiting impatiently, and greeting every familiar turn of the shore, as it gradually unfolded to his view, with expressions of delight. He scanned the old stone house eagerly, as they slowly drifted by, to see whether a year's rain and wind had wrought any change in it; but the shadow of the Rock hung so darkly about it that there was no deciding. On they went, the huge length of the Rock stretching itself slowly out, till at last the Culm houses and the little wharf came in sight. Noll's eyes were eager and pleased. Every one of those trim, snug little houses on the sand had places in his heart.

He had puzzled over every rent and patch in their roofs and weather-beaten sides. The tiny school-house, with windows glittering in the failing sunlight, was fairer in his eyes than any domed or spired edifice in Hastings.

As soon as the *Gull* touched the wharf, Noll was over her side, and there met Dirk. The great fellow was speechless with pleasure; and before he had found his tongue, Henry Fields, the teacher, came up.

"So glad to see you all!" said Noll, showing his delight in every movement; "it seems an age since I went away. And how are you all—the whole of you, the school, our old stone fortress, and everything?"

Dirk here found voice.

"Mortal glad to see you, master," he said; "but ye hev come in a bad time. The fever be here, sorry to tell ye."

Noll looked inquiringly at Fields.

"Yes," he said, "it is true. You had better go up to the house at once."

So the rest disembarked, and, accompanied by the teacher, started for the old stone house.

CHAPTER II

A TASTE OF THE OLD LIFE.

NOLL, too impatient to tarry for the slow steps of the remainder of his party, walked on before them. The thought of sickness on the Rock, which for a minute lay sadly on his heart, was all forgotten as he hurried up the shore. Just from the stir and bustle of the great city, the silence and solitude of this lonely bit of nature made itself doubly felt. He wondered, as he went along the sand, if Culm could have been so silent and shadowy when he lived upon it. It did not seem possible. The sun was down, and already the sea was hiding itself in mysterious lights and shadows. Its solemn voice echoed up and down the shore, one far rock crying to another through the dusky twilight. Voice of the sea, silence and shadow and

mystery, touched Noll's heart with a sense of awe. He came to the scene of the *Gull's* shipwreck, lingered a moment over the recollection, and hurried on. The stone house, sombre enough in its shadows, came in sight. Noll wished he could see a welcoming light streaming through its windows down the sand and across the sea; and thinking he would give the others that pleasure, he ran up the beach and up the piazza steps, pausing there to find in which pocket he had put the key. It was a long time before the rusty lock would yield to his efforts; but suddenly the door flew open with a bang that echoed through the silent house, and there was nothing to hinder his entrance. How chill and damp the rooms were! He took a peep into the library to see if it looked natural, but was unable to see much in the darkness; and remembering that his friends could not be far away, he ran down into the kitchen, threw the outside door open, and, groping by the dim light, found a few half-burned candles, which, for lack of anything better, were speedily set a-burning. Two of them were placed in the library window, to

welcome those who had not arrived; and the remaining one Noll took back to the kitchen, to see what could be effected before Hagar's arrival. Little enough of summer's warmth had crept into the stone house. Noll shivered as he bustled about the little kitchen, trying to find fuel enough to make a fire. Happily there were some cones and pine knots in a barrel in the shed, and a very ancient chair that he found in a closet was speedily in pieces; and by the time that voices and footsteps sounded from the front entrance, a bright, brisk fire was crackling. Hagar came around, through the sand, to her own province.

"Bress ye, honey!" said she, standing in the door, "ef ye hain't got de fire blazin' 'ready. Don' know what ye found to make it ob. An' de tea-kettle! Well! Hagar 'spected ye'd forgot all 'bout sech things, chile."

The old negress sat down in the warmth of the blaze with a sigh—partly of satisfaction at the favourable prospect of supper and partly of home-sickness.

"Isn't it good to be here, Hagar?" said

Noll delightedly, looking about at the familiar walls on which the firelight was dancing.

"It's good to be anywhar with you," said Hagar, her eyes following him about as if he were the only pleasant object for them to rest upon. "Hagar likes 'bout everything ye like, honey."

"Except Culm Rock," laughed Noll. "Now, Hagar, unless there's something else I can do for you, I'll go into the library, and see how Uncle Dick is getting along. I don't believe those candles can last much longer."

"Go 'long, chile. 'Spect Hagar's goin' to keep ye in de kitchen?"

In the meantime, as they came slowly up the shore, and as they sat in the dim library, waiting for Noll to make his appearance, Trafford and Henry Fields were talking of the Culm people, and of the fever, which had already taken one life. It appeared that a strange vessel, with fever on board, had touched at the Rock, and left one of its sick crew, in spite of the expostulations and entreaties of the Culm people. The sailor recovered; but one of the fishermen contracted the disease

and died, and there were a number of others lying very low with it. Fields, who was a stout, perfectly healthy man, had exposed himself fearlessly in alleviating the wants of the people over whom he had been placed as teacher, and had no fear of the fever; but he advised Trafford not to risk his own life and Noll's, and to return to Hastings soon. But to this Trafford objected; he was quite confident that the old stone house was far enough from the village to avoid the danger of contagion; and while the fever lasted, he would take care that Noll was kept out of harm's way. For himself he was not afraid, and it would be too bad to mar Noll's long-looked-for vacation by returning at once to Hastings. He would stay a while at least.

Fields did not press the matter, but advised his friend to use the utmost precautions till the danger was over. To which Trafford replied,—

“To be sure I shall. I wish, now, that my friend Dr. Baill had come down with us, as he at one time proposed; but we are in our Lord's hands, and when I remember all that

he has done for Noll and myself, my courage is strong. When he——”

The door opened, and Noll came in.

“How dim you are here!” he exclaimed, going at once to his candles; “I don’t know what we’re going to do for light till the stores come, Uncle Richard. There are only these two pieces, and a bit in the kitchen, and we shall be reduced to burning only one at a time;” and immediately out went one of the feeble glimmers, leaving the great library darker than ever.

Trafford laughed.

“Are we then reduced to such extremities?” he said; “the star-light would be preferable to that feeble rush-light.”

Fields rose up to go.

“I would like to spend the evening,” he said; “but that is impossible, on account of the sick ones. I will see you again to-morrow, and then, perhaps, it will not be advisable for me to come very often; but of that we can talk to-morrow.”

So saying, he bade them good-night, and Noll lighted him through the hall with the

fragment of candle. When he came back, he sat down in a chair by Trafford's, saying,—

“Is the fever really so dangerous, Uncle Richard?”

“I fear so. If we had only known of it, I should have stayed in Hastings a few weeks longer; and before I forget it, I want you to make me a promise.”

“A promise, Uncle Dick?”

“Yes; I want a promise from you, that while the fever lasts you'll be careful about exposing yourself,—not venturing into the village, or having intercourse with any of the fishermen. You can wait a week or two before visiting the school and your old scholars, can't you?”

“Yes; but what if they need help over there, Uncle Richard?”

“Then they shall have it. Fields says that all are doing well now, and that there is help enough; so that unnecessary exposure of your life will be both reckless and wicked.”

“I promise,” said Noll, not without great reluctance; for the hours that he was to spend at the village he had counted as one of his

greatest pleasures. "And now, Uncle Richard," he added, "don't let's stay another minute in this dark, chilly room. It's warm and pleasant down in the kitchen, if it is a kitchen. We've got a fire there, and Hagar is getting supper. It's the only room really fit to sit in to-night."

"It *is* damp and chilly here," said Trafford with a slight shiver. "I wonder if Hagar will make room for us in her dominions?"

"Yes, and be glad enough to," said Noll; "for the old house is lonesome for her."

Trafford rose to go; and Noll, securing the invaluable fragments of candle, followed after.

"O dear!" said Hagar, as the kitchen door opened; "ef ye hain't come to set down in dis yer clutt'rin' kitchen. 'Pears now as ef it made ye both boys to get here. 'Member how ye use ter be turnin' flapjacks fur me in dat ole Hastings kitchen, Mas'r Dick? Hagar'd grow young ef she could see dat agen. Gettin' ole enough now; 'spects de Lord'll be callin,' 'Hagar, come up,' pretty soon. Mebby, likely enough, it'll be on dis yer Rock now. Bress de Lord, anyhow."

"You aren't afraid of the fever, are you?" said Noll.

Hagar shrugged her shoulders. "Dar's no tellin'," she said, "'bout dis chile. 'Spects de Lord's in de feber, and ye knows Hagar isn't afeard ob him. Don't make much difference, nohow.—Will ye hab yer coffee strong to-night, Mas'r Dick?—I's 'pressed eber sence we lef dat ship dat dar's got ter be a sight ob prayin,' an' callin' on de Lord, to get us safe back home agen."

"Why, Hagar," said Trafford, "do you think the Lord is farther from us here than at Hastings?"

"Ain't no meetin'-house here," said Hagar evasively. "'Spects de Lord's eberywhar, though. Ye found him here, Mas'r Dick?"

"Yes," said Trafford; "and in all the sorrowful days that came afterward he never left me. He seems as near me here—nearer, perhaps—as at Hastings."

"Bress de Lord! I's glad ob dat," said Hagar. "'Spects de debble's gettin' in dis chile's heart, makin' her 'strust de Lord. I's allus 'feard ob dat when I's in dis yer lone-some house."

The old woman paused to lift her coffee and tea pots to the table. "Supper's ready, childr'n; Hagar wishes 'twas better fur ye."

They sat down to their first meal in the stone house, Trafford asking in the blessing for God's loving and abundant care to be over them. The homely little room looked even pleasant in the firelight,—Noll felt that; but he was conscious, too, of a slight fear lying in his heart—a dread of danger impending. He wished there were no fever and death over the rocks in Culm; but there was the consolation, and he hugged it close, that neither death nor danger could come without God's knowledge.

But the next morning he was not in the least heavy-hearted. The world was full of sunshine, and there was not a hint of death or danger in it. There were a hundred things which he meant to perform, in order to get household matters righted, and make their solitary life just as bright and pleasant as possible. He put off the exploring tours, for which he was aching, that these matters might be attended to.

When Trafford came down in the morning,

he found all the doors, from the piazza to Hagar's kitchen, wide open, and the clear, healthful sea-breeze blowing through. The great house had lost half of its dampness and chill already. Some one had been over from Culm in the early morning; for there were trunks, bags, and boxes on the piazza, and from one of them some pictures had been taken to brighten the library. Noll was busy taking off the lid of the book-box, and could hardly leave his occupation for Hagar's savoury breakfast. With his uncle's aid, the contents of the trunks and boxes were arranged to Noll's satisfaction by nightfall; and though tired enough with the unaccustomed labour, he could not resist the temptation of a stroll on the shore to see what the last tide had stranded. Here, with the lovely twilight just shadowing the sea, the breeze blowing cool and fresh about his tired head, and the early-lighted lamps twinkling down at him from the stone house, all Noll's love for Culm Rock came back; and he would have decided it to be the pleasantest home in the wide world, but for catching sight of Henry Fields at that moment

and remembering that sickness and death were hardly a mile away. He saw his uncle come out on the piazza to meet the Culm teacher, and he could hear their voices as he made his way among the pebbles in the fast-thickening twilight. When it had grown too dark for even his keen eyes to see, he went back to the house, and found his uncle still on the piazza, though Fields had gone back to Culm. Full of enthusiasm as to the result of his search, and talking of the plans he had laid for coming days, Noll forgot to ask about the progress of the fever, and thus escaped unpleasant news. And Trafford, glad to see the old sparkle and enthusiasm in his eyes, hid the truth in his heart, resolving that no anxiety which he could prevent should mar the boy's happiness.

The joy and pleasure which the next week held for Noll were unalloyed. Hagar gave up getting dinner for him in despair; for after his cheery good-bye in the morning he was seen no more till sunset, and sometimes not till after the shadows were thick and dark about the house; and the old negress's heart

was getting anxious. He explored every nook and corner of the Rock which did not come within dangerous limits of the fever, and longed ardently enough to go there too; he made long excursions into the dim and never-silent pine woods; discovered once that he was lost, but was fortunate enough to find the home-path before dusk; and came home night after night with such heavy spoil of cones and brittle boughs for Hagar's fire, that the old housewife's dislike for her surroundings was greatly diminished.

"Nuffin' like habin' a fire to make a place 'spectable," Hagar said; "an' dis yer looks like it," stowing her treasures away in the wood-shed.

And in all these happy days not a whisper of the fever's progress came to Noll's ears.

CHAPTER III

THE COMING OF DANGER.

WHEN returning at nightfall from his long walks, Noll was in the habit of visiting a certain part of the Rock, not a great way from Culm village, which Henry Fields had designated as a place for leaving letters, papers, or any communications which he might wish to make with his friends in the stone house. Hardly a day passed without Noll's finding a sealed note for his uncle in the shallow crevice of the Rock where the schoolmaster had left it. Once it struck him as rather strange that all these notes should be sealed so securely; little dreaming, however, that the secrecy was observed for his sake. Returning home one night a little earlier than usual, he climbed up the steep path leading to their stone letter-box,

and seeing a note in the crevice, sat down to enjoy the grand look-out from his elevation. Down below him the stone house stood in the shadows, the light from Hagar's fireplace twinkling faintly through the kitchen door; and the sea, lovely in all its far distances, lay calmly under the warm purpling sky. The new moon showed its thread of silver above the sea, and a golden star kept it company. Up from the sand stole the faint murmur of the tide, far enough away to be low and musical, and the only sound that broke the deep quiet. Noll, looking and listening, wondered if there could be any fairer spot in the whole world. Before he had satisfactorily decided this question, he remembered what he had climbed so high for, and that his uncle might possibly wish to see the contents of the note before late nightfall. He turned around to take the note, and found to his astonishment that it was not sealed. The breeze, or the great haste of the writer, had left it wide open; and these words were staring straight up at him:—

“There are two new cases to-day, and my hands are full. You had better leave the Rock without delay. H. F.”

For a minute Noll sat still with amazement, wondering where his thoughts could have been to so nearly forget all about the fever, danger, and suffering so near him. The next moment he grasped the note, and was dashing down the precipitous path, putting his neck in imminent peril. Could it be, he thought as he ran, that Uncle Richard knew what progress the fever was making, and had not told him? He did not believe it; and thinking to make up for the minutes he lingered on the cliff, he ran homeward as fast as possible, arriving at the piazza breathless with haste. He went first to the library, but was surprised to find no one there. He ran up to his uncle's chamber, and came back with a blank face. When Hagar caught sight of him as he came into her kitchen, he was looking very puzzled indeed.

"Where in the world is Uncle Richard, Hagar?" he exclaimed.

"Now, honey, cetch yer breath 'fore ye goes eny further," said Hagar. "Dis chile 'spected somethin' was after ye, way ye cum fru dat hall. What's de matter?"

"Nothing; only, where is Uncle Dick?"

I've got something I'm in a hurry to give him."

"He habn't been in de house sence dinner, chile. T'ought ye wur both off in de woods," said Hagar, looking surprised.

"No; I wonder where he can be. Does he go to walk often when I am away?"

"Neber, honey; can't t'ink what dis means."

Neither could Noll. He went back to the library with an anxious face; and after waiting there till it was too dark to see much through the great windows, went out upon the shore, and walking up and down the sand shouted his uncle's name. Only the echoes shouted back from the cliff-tops. He went back to the library, lighted the lamps, and sat down to wait a little longer, his anxiety growing with every minute; but while he sat there a figure came through the darkness to Hagar's door, nearly frightening her out of the use of her tongue.

"Be quiet, Hagar," said the master, "and bring me a change of clothing. Go softly; and on no account let Noll suspect that I have returned."

Hagar obeyed in fear and trembling.

"Has ye got de feber, chile, or what?" she chattered, as she brought him the change of garments.

"No," said Trafford quietly; "but I have been in it. Be quiet, Hagar; they needed me over there, and I went. I shall depend on you not to let Noll suspect where I have been. Now you may go."

Hagar took her terrified face back to her tea-table. Exchanging his infected clothing for fresh garments, Trafford made a hasty bundle, loaded it with stones, and threw it far into the sea, and then went round to the piazza, as if just returned. At the first sound of his footsteps Noll was at the door.

"O Uncle Richard!" he cried, "where *have* you been? Has anything happened to you?"

"No," said Trafford, greeting the boy warmly; "nothing has harmed me."

"I've been in such a hurry to see you, I could hardly wait," said Noll. "I found to-day's note unsealed and wide open, and these words staring at me. I thought you ought to know about it at once."

He held the note up in the light of the hall

lamp for his uncle to read. Trafford put his arm about Noll's shoulder when he had finished, saying gravely,—

"I wish you had not seen this, my boy; but since you have I can only say that there is no greater cause for alarm than usual."

"And you are not surprised?" said Noll in amazement.

For a moment Trafford was at a loss for a suitable reply.

"I have had more time to take note of the fever's progress than you," he said, a little hurriedly;—"but aren't we staying from Hagar's supper too long?"

The current of Noll's thoughts was changed at once.

"Why, Uncle Dick, I'd forgotten all about supper," he said; "and you're tired and hungry after your long walk. Well, that note put everything else out of my head."

"Dear heart!" thought Trafford, as they went to the dining-room, "may God keep you from the danger that threatens."

Hagar moved about pouring their tea with an anxious and wistful face. Noll was silent,

conjecturing where his uncle could have been; and their supper would have been lonesome enough but for Trafford, whose spirits seemed light and cheerful. Noll's suspicions, if he had any, were disarmed by his uncle's manner; and with the delicacy on which Trafford had counted, he forbore to ask again about the long late walk. But if Noll could have looked into the Culm cottages that warm afternoon, the mystery of his uncle's absence would have been explained. He would have seen Henry Fields, worn and tired, giving up his patients to the care of the calm, steady-nerved man, and taking an afternoon of much-needed rest; he would have seen his uncle going from bedside to bedside, carrying cooling drinks, administering medicines, and giving the sufferers every kindness in his power. But Noll, happily unconscious of the danger to which his uncle had been exposed, allowed this little event to fade out of his recollection, for the time being at least. But his exploring tours were confined to narrower limits, and he was in and around the house many times a day, thinking that it was not good for the old house to get too silent.

In a quiet enough channel their life ran along for more than a week after this; and Noll, wondering whether his vacation was not getting to be just a little monotonous after all, was considering whether it were safe or possible to have Ned Thorn come down and spend the remainder of it with him. He was sitting on the piazza one evening, planning about it; and not wishing to send an invitation, if by coming Ned's life were to be endangered, he ran into the library to ask his uncle's opinion.

"Uncle Richard," he began as he entered—then stopped, all the words dying upon his lips. Trafford had been reading by his study-lamp. He was still sitting in his chair, but the book had fallen from his hand upon the floor; his head had sunk upon his breast; and there was something about the whole figure that made Noll conscious in a moment that this was not slumber. Nearly a minute the boy stood looking, a sudden fear creeping into his heart and chilling him from head to foot; then he ran to the door and shouted, "Hagar!" A half-minute of waiting; then the door down at the end of the hall opened, and Hagar's head became visible.

"Come quick!" exclaimed Noll. "Uncle Richard is faint, ill—or something! Quick, Hagar!"

The old negress almost ran through the hall. She pushed past Noll, threw up her hands with, "De Lord hab mercy!" at the sight before her, and uttering incoherent, half-smothered exclamations of endearment and terror, began to chafe Trafford's hands vigorously. Noll stood by, so shocked and startled as to be almost incapable of assistance. But what with Hagar's rubbing and chafing and a dash of cold water, the breath began to struggle through Trafford's lips; and at last he sighed heavily and opened his eyes.

"O Uncle Richard," cried Noll, caressing his hands, "do you know me? Can you see me?" Trafford pressed his nephew's hand for answer.

"Lemme gib him dis wine, honey," said Hagar, who had hurried to her cupboard and back; "jes' take dis yer, Mas'r Dick, an' mebbey 'twill 'vive ye. O poor chile! jes' take it, an' let Hagar hear ye speak agen."

Trafford swallowed the wine, and after an

effort spoke. "This swoon," he said, "is the forerunner of the fever.—Noll, my dear, precious boy, you must save yourself; there is no time to lose."

Hagar groaned and sank down upon the floor, calling upon the Lord, and wringing her hands with anguish. Not a muscle of Noll's face stirred, but his heart sank into the depths of pain.

Trafford beckoned Noll to his side. "Dear boy," said he, his anxiety making his voice tremulous, "promise me that you will at once seek a place of safety. Go back to Hastings; God will take care of me."

All trace of colour had left Noll's face. "Promise me," said Trafford, "and you will take a great burden off my heart."

The boy looked up firm and calm. "Uncle Richard," his voice intense with emotion, "do you think I could ever run away and leave you? God is going to take care of me too."

"But, dear child," Trafford began, unable to repress his anxiety, "I want you—"

But Noll interrupted with, "Don't trouble your heart any more, Uncle Richard—don't!

I'm not going to leave you; I can't do it! God could never want me to do it. I can help to take care of you; and when you are getting well, what would you do without me? And now, where shall I go? I'll go to Culm after Henry Fields, or anywhere,—only tell me what to do quick, Uncle Richard."

"It is dark, and you had better wait till morning," said Trafford wearily. But darkness was nothing to Noll. Snatching his cap in the hall, he darted out into the night before Trafford or Hagar could remonstrate. It was not yet raining; but clouds hung low and dark over the whole sky, and all light seemed to have fled from the earth, save where the sea gleamed faintly. But Noll knew the shore path well enough, and ran as he never ran before. Of the pain that was in his heart he tried not to think, for it was too grievous. Yet, crush down his thoughts as resolutely as he would, there was the fearful consciousness, present at every moment, that his uncle was smitten by the fever, and that he had heard Henry Fields say that few ever recovered from it.

The sigh of the wind around the cliffs, the wail of the sea as the tide rose, were unheard by him. He could think of only one thing,—help for Uncle Richard. On he ran, to find that the tide had crept over his path at the narrowest part of the shore, making a climb over the rocks necessary; and here, in the darkness, and stumbling through haste, he fell, laming his foot so that his first step upon it caused a cry of pain. But on he went through the darkness, unmindful of his pain, and thinking that he had never known the way so long before. The curtainless windows of the Culm huts allowed him to see whether the schoolmaster was within, as he came down the beach path in front, and not till he had passed two or three dwellings did Noll catch sight of his tall figure. He rapped on the weather-beaten door; and when Fields opened it in some wonder, he could not at first articulate a word. But the schoolmaster, looking at Noll's white, worried face, and noting his breathlessness, comprehended the whole. He himself stood shocked and silent for a moment. Then he said, "Sit down and rest you. I

will be ready in a few minutes. When did this happen?"

"Only a little while ago,—after tea," panted Noll; "and if you are coming I will go back at once. Hagar may need help."

"But you have no lantern, and the way is not safe without," said Fields: "how did you ever find the path? Wait a little, and go back with me."

Only "I can't" sounded from the darkness; and running to the door to call him back, the schoolmaster heard the echo of Noll's retreating footsteps already far up the sand.

When Hagar, a little later, heard the sound of his returning feet, her keen old ears took note that they came wearily enough.

"Jes' dragged hisself to deff, poor chile," she muttered with tears. "O bressed Lord, sabe dese chil'en ob dine! 'Spects we's all gwine to perish ef ye don't put forth yer hand dis time." And meeting Noll's white, tired face as he came into the hall, she lifted up her voice and wept.

CHAPTER IV.

DEATH.

THE tardy gray dawn, glimmering over the sea, revealed a solitary figure sitting on the farthest point of rocks that stretched seaward from the stone house. The figure was Noll. Long before the east began to whiten, he had taken his position here to watch for the *Gull*, knowing that it was its day to sail for Hastings.

Since the fever had raged so violently among the fishermen, the youthful masters of the *Gull* had held communication with the Rock only by the little boat that hung at the *Gull's* side. Noll knew that on this morning they would not touch at the wharf; and his only hope of sending a message to Hastings lay in the chance—small enough, he knew—of attracting their attention by signs or shouts. When on the

previous evening, as they sat by the unconscious sick one, Noll had proposed to send to Hastings for Doctor Baill, his uncle's friend, Fields assented quickly for Noll's sake, though in his own heart he doubted whether the doctor could reach Culm in time to be of any service. But Noll, knowing no such doubts, had watched out impatiently the long, dragging night, and before dawn sat shivering on the rocks, keeping anxious vigil. The tide sucked in and out among the rocks, the weeds and swaying mussels rustled in their rise and fall; but other noise along the shore or on the sea there was not, as the blank, chilly dawn deepened into day.

Noll looked about him with a heart full of the most intense suffering. Gray sea, gray sky, and gray old house held not a sign of comfort for him. Death hung over the house, and there was no present hope of averting it, unless God would put forth his hand. Oh, how he had prayed, all through the long and lonesome night, that God would be merciful! How *could* he lose this dear uncle,—only just found, as it were,—and go back into the world

without a relative? Uncle Dick was all that was left. Would not God spare him?

The dreary sea, though full of voices, had no answer; and Noll, shivering and sighing, could only murmur unceasingly in his heart, "Oh, dear heavenly Father! be merciful, be merciful!"

Daylight was full upon land and sea when the *Gull* came in sight round the great angle of the Rock. Noll at once jumped up, swinging his handkerchief upon the end of a stick, and shouting with all his might. The vessel, under full headway, dashed on unheeding. Almost frantic with anxiety, he ran to the very edge of the sea, shouting, screaming, and even stamping his feet in the desire to make all the noise he could. He thought, standing there, that even this last frail little hope was to be denied him. But just as he was dropping his stick in despair, a figure appeared against the white background of the sail, waving a hand, and Noll knew that he was heard. Somehow the consciousness that he had succeeded took away all his strength, and he sank down on the rock with no heart for

anything, until he heard the grating of rowlocks. It was young Ben's voice that greeted him with, "How're ye, my hearty? What's the trouble?"

Noll knew that he must be brief and hinder them but a minute. "We're sick here at the stone house," he said, "and want to get help from Hastings. I want to send this letter to Dr. Baill, and have you carry it, if you will, directly to him. If he isn't at home, wait till you can see him, and give the letter into no hands but his. He will come as soon as he gets it, if there is any way to get here. Is the *Gull* engaged?"

"Well,—sorry 'tis so,—we've got a cargo for down-shore in a day or two."

Noll leaned over the rock, looking down at the young skipper with an appeal in his eyes which there was no resisting. "You don't know," he said, "what a favour you will be doing. I will pay you for any loss of time—double, yes, ten times the amount—only start with the doctor just as soon as he is ready."

Ben looked steadfastly a moment at the white, imploring face, then said, "Can't say no

to ye, somehow. Heard my old dad tell what a master ye was at helpin' other folks out o' trouble; pity ef there wasn't somebody to give ye a lift, now yer own turn's come. Yes, I'll fetch the doctor sure, if I can get him, so rest easy 'bout it."

Noll had heard enough. He dropped back to his old seat, the happy tears filling his eyes. The oars grated in their locks; Ben shouted, "Good-day!" and the splash of water died faintly away.

He was once more alone; the message was on its way to Hastings; he had succeeded! And now, if God would only spare Uncle Richard's life,—if success might only follow Ben's errand! But oh, it all went back to God, after all. There was no hope in looking anywhere else. Ben might be successful, the doctor might come with all his skill and wisdom, but if God said "Nay!" there was no hope. Noll's consciousness of this truth was deep enough. There was no earthly aid for him to place hope upon. The whole lay with God; and to God he went, his soul crying to him in its sadness and anguish as he laid down his

weary head on the sea-weeds. He kept it there a long time,—he had so much to plead, so much to ask for. It seemed to him as if he never wanted to take it up, but to call upon God unceasingly.

While he went back up the shore path toward the house the rain began to patter down. Afar off the dreary sky faded into the dreary sea. At the piazza steps he met Henry Fields going back to his Culm patients. Noll asked a question with his eyes.

“I—I am afraid he is no better,” said the schoolmaster, shunning the entreating face before him. “He had a little interval of consciousness while you were gone. He begs me most earnestly to send you away and keep you from all contact with him. What can I answer him, when I know how you feel?”

A firm look crept into Noll’s face. “I shall stay,” he said, “and watch over him. Hagar can’t do all, and I wouldn’t let her if she could. Do you think I *could* run away and leave him?”

“No,” said Fields; “I know that you will give your life for his if necessary. But keep

as strong a heart as you can, and don't stay in the sick-room too long at a time. There's nothing like fresh air."

The schoolmaster went on his way, and Noll ascended the steps to encounter another trial of his purpose. Hagar met him beseechingly.

"Jes' wait fur a minnit, honey," she said; "'pears as ef dis ole heart was jes' breakin' fur ye an' Mas'r Dick! Hagar wants ye to sabe yerself, chile. Dis ole woman's mos' done for, an' 'twon't make no diff'rence ef she goes dis time, nohow. But you, honey,"—here the tears began to roll down her cheeks,—“are young an' worf sumthin' to eberybody. 'Pears as ef ye couldn't be spared, nohow. I's gwine to take care ob Mas'r Dick all myself, and keep ye from de feber ef I ken. Den Hagar'll sabe ye for all de rest ob de folks dat's left at Hastings."

But Noll shook his head. "I thank you a thousand times, Hagar," he said; "but my life isn't worth so much more than anybody else's. I don't think I could enjoy it very much if I had saved it by running away from my duty.

We'll both take care of Uncle Richard; and then if God calls either of us, we shall be at our posts and ready. Now, if you'll go and show me what to do, Hagar, I'll be glad."

"O honey!" said Hagar, as she led the way, "ye makes dis ole heart glad an' sorry too. Ye allus has de Lord right in yer heart, somehow."

Noll was a faithful watcher, and in the necessary absence of Henry Fields much of the time, and of Hagar to attend to household duties, he was often entirely alone with the sick one. He found the unconsciousness, and at times delirium, of his uncle, the hardest of all to bear. He longed for a word, or even a look of recognition. There was no doubt but that Trafford knew Noll's touch, even in his deep slumber, for it often quieted him. But other sign of recognition there was none, and it was one of the greatest of Noll's griefs. Oh, if he *must* lose this dear friend, would not God let him speak one word, just one more word to him? Watching by this bedside, Noll's heart alternated between hope and fear. Sometimes it rose high with faith and courage,

and he was confident that as soon as Dr. Baill arrived the fever's progress would be stayed ; again this heart of his could find no hope and comfort anywhere, except in the thought of God. The second day after the *Gull's* departure was a glad and anxious one for him ; but it held a most bitter disappointment. Though he walked up and down the shore, and climbed the rocks to get a better view, no *Gull* hove in sight, and night shut down over land and sea. Still he did not give up, but walked the piazza till almost midnight, hoping to hear the sound of oars and the echo of voices. But none came. Either Ben had failed to find the doctor, or the doctor could not come.

That night Henry Fields' accustomed eyes saw that the patient's strength failed very fast ; Noll, in and out the whole night long, saw nothing unusual, blinded a little, perhaps, by his anxious waiting for the *Gull*. Morning, dim and draggled with rain, dawned, and the schoolmaster departed for the village, promising to return as soon as possible. Noll took his place beside the unconscious sleeper, struggling to bear his disappointment with something like

fortitude. But in his heart there was the sorrowful "Why?" which is in all our hearts in times of affliction. *Why* does God do so? Why cannot my poor little prayer be granted? Why? Oh, why? Oh, why?

He had time enough during that sad, rainy forenoon, to ponder over this question. Remembering how tenderly God had dealt with him in time past, he knew that whatever he was made to suffer, whatever burden of sorrow God put upon him, it was done for his own good. This was hard enough to realize at the present time, but he *knew* it, and the consciousness was a comfort to cling to.

Henry Fields did not again make his appearance till the afternoon was half gone. He turned away, after his first look at Trafford's face, to hide something which he did not wish Noll to see. By-and-by he said,—

"The rain has slacked a little. You had better go out into the air, even if it is damp, for this room is close. I will keep watch now."

Noll went. The gray, sombre day was in accord with his own heart, he felt. The rain

pattered down softly every little while; mists were beginning to settle upon the face of the sea, and its voice, creeping through, had for him a sad, sad echo. Daylight would soon be gone, robbed of its length by the shrouding fog. Perhaps, he thought with a little thrill, nightfall might bring the *Gull* and assistance. Dr. Baill would certainly come, if it were a possibility. This extremely frail little hope still gave him some comfort. He went to the piazza, and sat down out of reach of the rain to watch.

Night came on apace. The sea was swallowed up in the fog. The *Gull*, if it was on its way, would have a difficult path to find, he thought; and hope slipping away from him, he was on the point of going back to the sick-room. But at that moment Hagar's step sounded along the hall, and attracted his attention at once. It was not her usual quick shuffle, and her footsteps expressed—what? He turned round, his heart beating fast with sudden apprehension. The tears were streaming down Hagar's cheeks, and as she caught sight of Noll's face she dropped—almost fell—upon the piazza floor.

"Chile—honey," she moaned out,—"*Mas'r Dick's gone.*"

For a full minute Noll looked at her, his lips apart, his eyes reading hers in the swift seconds; then this word, born of his utter inability to comprehend the dreadful truth, burst from his lips, "*Gone?*"

"Yes," sobbed Hagar; "he hab gone—gone for eber. De Lord's took him."

The silence that followed was more terrible to the old woman than any burst of lamentation could have been. She hid her face in her apron, sobbing softly and not daring to look at Noll, and heard only the solemn sea wailing with its everlasting voice. And so unutterably lonesome did it sound to her that she got up softly, peering out of her apron enough to see that Noll's face was turned seaward, and stole round to her kitchen, where she might shut out the sea and have her mourning all to herself. The night fell thick and black over the earth, but still the motionless figure sat in the piazza. Voices echoed dimly from the shrouded sea, oars splashed, a lantern gleamed through the fog, but the figure sat still. Up

the sand came footsteps, the lantern flared a dim circle of light over the great front of house, and a voice that could be no other than Ben's said,—

“We hit the landing lucky that time, doctor.”

Out from the fog stepped a tall figure wrapped in its great cape coat, and looking quickly about, took in the dreariness of the whole,—the gray front of house, the fog and blackness enwrapping all, and the solitary, desolate figure.

The doctor took two or three quick steps forward, exclaiming, “Noll Trafford!” and Noll, all the pent-up pain and anguish struggling in his voice, cried out, “O Dr. Baill!”

CHAPTER V.

THE GRAVE ON THE CLIFF.

DR. BAILL stood silent and motionless on the steps, shocked at the revelation which Noll's voice made. When he spoke it was to Ben.

"You will lie off the Rock to-night?" he asked.

Ben, who had taken a great liking to the doctor, hesitated a moment, but answered,—

"If ye say so, I'll do it, doctor."

"Well, I do say so," said the doctor; "we may want you in the morning. Come ashore in good season, and I'll see you. You can go now, if you like."

Ben and his lantern went down through the fog to the shore. Something in the energetic, self-reliant ring of the doctor's voice, fell comfortingly upon Noll's heart; and when the tall

figure of the great physician turned toward him, his hot, dry eyes filled with tears, and the cry struggled up from his heart,—

“O doctor, what made you so late?”

“I was away from home when Ben came, and only got the message this morning.—When—when did he die?”

“About two hours ago,” said Noll, tremulously.

“And you—where have you been since then?”

“Out here.”

“So I suspected,” said the doctor, with some displeasure in his tone. “You have been exposed to the fever, of course. This will not do at all. You must go in.”

“But, doctor—,” Noll began.

“Oh, I know all about it,” said the doctor; “but you sent for me to come, and now I am going to have my orders obeyed. Will you show me the way in?”

Noll got up, unwillingly enough, and led the way, while the doctor came groping behind. A single lamp was burning in the library, and some one had built a fire on the hearth to keep out the damp. The doctor's first

business was to take a keen look at Noll's face. Then he made a quiet survey of the room, and said,—

“We must have a brighter fire than that. This room is too chilly.”

Noll got up, saying something about more wood. But the doctor, laying a hand on each of Noll's shoulders, said,—

“No; I have taken possession here now, and you are no longer to have any care or thought about anything. Do you understand me?”

As he spoke, he pushed a lounge from its corner toward the fire, adding,—

“You are to lie down here and go to sleep.”

“Sleep?” echoed Noll, as if such a thing were an utter impossibility; “how can I sleep? I want to go and see—see him.”

“Just the thing which you must not do,” said the doctor decidedly. “Please to lie down at once, for I have many things to attend to.”

Noll obeyed, turning his face from the light, that the doctor might not see his quivering lips. But the doctor saw more than Noll

suspected. He shook the drops from his great cape coat, warmed the inside before the fire, and spread the whole over the figure on the lounge.

"Now," said he, with wonderful tenderness in his voice, "if I am cruel with you for a little while, please remember it is for your own good."

Then he went away, and Noll was alone.

It was a comfort to hear his familiar voice, and to know that he had taken charge of everything after all, Noll thought; and it was Uncle Richard's well-beloved friend. And then came to him a keen and bitter sense of loss. He was all alone now,—all that was left to bear the name of Trafford. Oh, how *could* he bear it? How could he go back all alone to Hastings to live in the old house, where Uncle Dick and he had been so happy? How was his life to be ever happy again?

"O dear Master!" his heart cried out appealingly, "come near to me now; for there is no one else to give me comfort in the whole wide world."

But wearied Nature here asserted her rights, and he fell asleep. A sound sleep it was; for

Dr. Baill was in and out of the room all night long, and there were feet going to and fro just without in the hall. But Noll slept through it all, the deep, heavy slumber of an exhausted person. When at last he opened his bewildered eyes, he could not for a moment recollect where he was, nor what had happened. But with a sudden pang at his heart the remembrance of yesterday's events came vividly back. He was all alone.

It must have been long after late morning-time, for a few sunbeams that were struggling through breaking clouds came in at the south window. Somehow the room had been made to look a great deal more cheerful than usual. A brisk fire blazed in the fireplace, and roared up the chimney cheerily. A white-draped table, which stood in the middle of the room, showed that some one had had breakfast there. An open book, with the leaves turned down, lay there too, hinting that book and breakfast had been enjoyed together. The tears swam in Noll's eyes as he looked. All this was not for Uncle Richard.

The house was very still; not a voice nor

a footstep echoed. The never-silent waves was the only sound he could hear, and so he lay still,—a dull ache in his heart, and feeling little inclination to get up. By-and-by he heard voices without, apparently on the shore; and pretty soon firm and heavy steps came along the piazza and into the hall. Dr. Baill looked in. He was a noble-looking man,—getting gray a little already with the cares of a great practice; and his voice had a most heart-some ring in it as he said,—

“Well, you’re looking brighter this morning. When shall I tell Hagar to bring you some breakfast?”

Noll put up his hand with a little gesture of impatience. Breakfast was the thing farthest from his thoughts.

“Will you come in a minute, Dr. Baill?” he asked.

The doctor shut the door behind him.

“Certainly,” he said as he came forward; “I am your most obedient servant. What will you have of me?”

“In the first place,” said Noll, “I don’t want any breakfast.”

"To be sure you don't," said the doctor smiling; "but really I think you will have to have some."

"And," continued Noll, throwing off the greatcoat and sitting up, "I want you to let me see Uncle Richard this morning. I'm rested, and can bear it."

Dr. Baill sighed. For a minute he stood looking irresolutely into the fire, then, with something like dread in his stout heart, turned to do his sorrowful duty. With a gravely tender voice he said as he sat down by Noll,—

"My dear boy, you can never see his face again."

Noll would have sprung to his feet, but for the doctor's hand. His eyes, suddenly wild and excited, demanded "*Why?*" as impetuously as any words could have done.

"Because," answered the doctor, "we were obliged to bury the poor clay at the first glimmer of dawn."

A moment Noll sat stunned by the truth; then he burst into tears. The doctor's arm went round the boy's shaking figure, drawing it close to himself; the curly head he pressed

against his own breast, stroking back the hair from the forehead as tenderly as a woman. The doctor had boys of his own at home.

"How *could* you do it?" cried Noll as soon as he could speak. "What *right* had you to bury him without telling me?"

The doctor was kind and patient.

"There was no other way. To delay was deadly. You were sleeping soundly, and I dared not run the risk of another exposure."

"But I wanted to run the risk!" cried Noll; "and, oh, it was cruel for you to let me sleep. O Dr. Baill, he was all I had left."

"Yes," said the doctor kindly; "but I had my duty to do all the same. I didn't do it because it was my own pleasure."

"And now I'm all alone," Noll cried, without heeding; "my friends are all gone."

"Is that true?" said the doctor, drawing the speaker closer to him.

"What true?"

"That you have no friends left."

Noll made no reply, suddenly aware to what a length his grief was running. Only last night he was praying his great Friend to come

near and comfort him; now he was shutting heart and ear to all friends as well as to Him.

"No, doctor," he said after a long silence, "that was not true. I've a great many friends. One of them will never desert me if I don't forget Him."

"Then," said the doctor, "I should think you ought to be comforted."

"I am. If it weren't for Him, I should just want to lie down and die too. But I can't help being sad—and—and lonely, you know."

"Certainly not," said the doctor, with the utmost tenderness. "You have had hard burdens to bear since coming here. From what I have heard you bore them nobly. Now, if the quiet sleeper up in that little place of graves could speak, don't you think he would bid you take up your life again and be comforted?"

Noll could find no voice with which to answer.

"We know," continued the doctor, "that once he would have shuddered at the thought of lying down to rest on that lonely wind-beaten cliff; but now we have the joy of remembering that Christ had so entered into his

heart that all fear of death was gone, and that wherever he slumbered God was with him. Is not that a comfort? He used to talk with me of your great influence in bringing about this change. Is not that a comfort to remember too? Why, it seems to me that if anybody could be comforted, it might be you."

"I am," was all the answer Noll could make.

They sat a little while in silence. Then the doctor said cheerily,—

"Now you must have some breakfast. We have talked altogether too long. You see you made me forget that I was a doctor, for a little while."

"You can doctor in more ways than one," said Noll, lifting his head.

The doctor got up and mended the fire. When he came back to the lounge he said,—

"Now I am going down to the kitchen after your breakfast, and a basin of cold water for you to plunge that white face into. I can't take you back to Hastings looking like the ghost of yourself."

"Back to Hastings!"—how the words struck upon Noll's heart.

"When will that be?" he asked.

"In a day or two," said the doctor, "if we can get away."

"O Dr. Baill!" said Noll.

"What? Does that trouble you? What is the matter?"

"It is a great deal too soon; I can't go back so quickly."

"But you must," said the doctor in his most inexorable tone; "even two days from now is not soon enough, if we could only get away sooner. But I sent Ben back this morning after supplies for those people over in the village, so that we shall have to wait a little longer."

"But I might stay a few days after you were gone," ventured Noll.

"Cherish no hope of that," said the doctor smiling; "the quicker you are back in Hastings the better."

Noll looked as if he felt the edicts of this new master to be very severe, but silently acquiesced.

Pretty soon Hagar came in with the breakfast tray, the doctor following after with the

basin of water. The old woman, probably warned beforehand, bore herself quietly, and kept back her tears.

"Hagar's glad to see ye lookin' bright dis mornin', honey," she said as she placed the breakfast things; and once she found an opportunity to pass her hand over his head caressingly, —the only way she had of telling him what was in her heart.

When she had gone back to the kitchen, and Noll had seated himself at the neat white-covered table, the doctor picked up his book and sat down opposite, pouring the tea, and presiding over the toast, as if he had been accustomed to such duties all his life. And though his eyes were much of the time on his book, he made sure that Noll ate.

"I wonder if you are going to deny me one thing, Dr. Baill?" Noll asked, after pushing away his plate.

"I thought I had denied you more than that already," said the doctor smiling. "What do you want now?"

"I want you to let me go up on the cliff to the graves,—just a little while. It's going to

be such a long, long time before I can come again, you know."

"Well," said the doctor with some reluctance, "if you will keep quiet to-day and obey orders, you may go a little while to-morrow; though I don't think it's a good thing for you."

The doctor could not have desired a more strict obedience to his commands than Noll gave for the rest of the day; and the next forenoon the desired permission was granted.

"And remember," added the doctor, "not to stay too long; for I might feel obliged to come after you."

Noll climbed slowly enough, aware for the first time how much the week's care and anxiety had told upon his strength, and stopping once to rest beside the stony path, soon came out upon the little place of graves. Except that the sea glimmered on all sides, it was a dreary place. Not a green thing flourished in the sand; there were no pure white stones. Here and there a black, weather-beaten headboard was the only attempt to distinguish one grave from another. But Noll had eyes only for the freshly-heaped mound, lying a little apart from

the others, and threw himself down there, forgetting the doctor's counsel, his own resolution to give way to grief no more,—everything, in fact, except the consciousness that they had buried the last one of his blood from him, and that he slept under the sand, with no ear for anything he could say. But this burst of grief did not last long; and when it was over he sat up with a more resigned heart than he had had since the hour of death. For Uncle Richard the old things had passed away; for himself the duty was to take up life and work, and go on cheerfully with it to the end. Oh, what a life he wanted to make it!—so faithful and true to the Lord's work,—so cheerful, kind, and full of good deeds that everybody would be glad he had lived.

“O Jesus,” he prayed earnestly, “be always with me, and help me to remember and do the work which I shall find. I promise to try to live always after this for everybody's good. O dear Master, help me to be kind and patient, and never weary of trying to make some one happier and better, and to never forget for a moment this promise I have made.”

Whether he did forget or not, time will show you. The solemnness of the promise he had made filled his heart, and made his face grave enough, as he went back down to Dr. Baill; but the doctor was ~~pleased~~ to find that in spite of the ~~graveness~~, a new peace and cheerfulness ~~had~~ taken possession of him.

CHAPTER VI.

HOME, AND YET NOT HOME.

THE sun was dipping into the sea, going to rest in a great glory of colour that streamed behind the city roofs and spires to the far eastern horizon. Sails in the harbour blushed rosy; merry voices of home-returning boat parties echoed over the lapping green waves; porters shouted on the wharves, and sailors sang as the anchor rattled down for a stay in port. The murmur of the great city stole down, and made its voice heard even among the wharves,—a great, busy, bustling, cheerful voice, Dr. Baill thought, as, standing on the *Gull's* deck, he looked and listened.

“The old hive has a pleasant look about it; eh, Noll?” he said. “I can hear the hum of the workers even here.”

"Yes," said Noll; "it seems good to see it once more. Hagar, out yonder, looks almost as wishful as if it were the gate to Paradise."

The doctor, however, did not seem to hear; he was thoughtfully watching their winding way among the buoys and anchored ships, and congratulating himself that the long and heart-wearying duties which had fallen upon him were so nearly performed. After all, he thought, the days of his absence had not been entirely without profit or pleasure. He had found something to learn even at Culm Rock. And now, what was going to become of Noll Trafford? This question had occurred to the doctor at intervals all day, but he had put it away from him, thinking there was no immediate need of troubling himself about it. So far as money was concerned, the boy was rich—there was going to be neither poverty nor want to worry about; but where was he to find a home? His own, the doctor remembered, had four boys in it already: he would rejoice to take in this one, if there were a solitary hope of so doing. There was Gray, the family lawyer; but he was unmarried, and

really had no home: and there were the Thorns. Here he happened to remember that nothing had been said to Noll about the matter; and, a little curious to know whether he had a plan in view, the doctor said,—

“I shall take Hagar and you home with me to-night. Your house has been shut up too long to be ready on such short notice.”

“Why!” said Noll quickly. “Do you mean it will be damp, unwholesome, or what?”

“Perhaps neither,” said the doctor; “but when one is returning from a long absence, it is good to find warmth, lights, and a welcome at one’s own house.”

The doctor had unintentionally touched a tender spot. Noll bit his lips hard to keep them from quivering, and said with an effort,—

“I don’t expect any of them, doctor; but—but I’d rather go home.”

“I’m not sure that it will be safe for me to let you,” said the doctor; “long-empty houses are always lonesome.”

“I know; but I might as well go first as last. I expect to be lonesome,—I can’t help

but miss *him* at every step ; but I want to be brave about it, and not be putting off what I've got to do at last."

The doctor mentally cried, "Bravo !"

"Well," said he, "I will let you try it a few days. But remember, don't you go to troubling your head about lawyer's business yet. I shall tell Gray to let you alone for a while. Go out and see your friends, and have your friends come and see you ; come to my office a dozen times a-day ; be with Ned Thorn all you can, for he has about the brightest flow of spirits of any young person of my acquaintance ; and above all, don't you sit down in that silent house and *think*. If you do, I shall put you under *surveillance*.—Ah, here we are," as the *Gull* jarred against the wharf. "Now, hurrah for home and the boys !" exclaimed the doctor.

Noll walked across the deck to help Hagar ashore. As he stepped upon the wharf he caught sight of the doctor with one boy in his arms, a second tugging to be taken up too, while Johnny Baill sat impatiently in the carriage.

"Oh, my dears!" said the doctor, "what is to become of me?—Ho, Johnny boy, jump out here, and let me look at you; I'll insure the horse."

Down dropped the reins, and out of the carriage came the doctor's eldest,—a tolerably well-grown boy, but getting just as an affectionate embrace as the younger ones. Noll looked on, glad at the welcome the doctor was getting, but feeling his own lack of one most keenly. There was nobody left to welcome him.

"Well, well," said the doctor, setting down one of his treasures, "we must not forget other people.—Johnny," (in a whisper,) "there's Noll Trafford. Can't you warm his heart a little for him?"

And before Noll was aware, a warm hand stole into his, and Johnny, with a sympathizing look on his ruddy, healthy face, was saying,—

"It's jolly to have you back again. You don't look as if you were very glad though; but we are, if you aren't. Come home with pa and the rest of us; won't you? We've got

a splendid supper waiting for him, and it will be just twice as good if you are there. *Do now!*"

For half a minute Noll hesitated, tempted by the vision of the doctor's pleasant home, the waiting supper, and these merry boys, in contrast with his own silent and deserted house; then he decided not to accept.

"Oh," says Johnny, "that is too bad now. What is the rea—"

But here the carriage which had been called for Noll came up, and the doctor called to his flock,—

"In with you, boys.—Now, Noll, I'm sorry to say good-night; but let me see you in good season to-morrow morning. Sorry you won't come home with us. Good-night, my dear fellow."

And off rolled the doctor and his happy companions. Noll helped Hagar to her seat, gave the driver directions, and then they too turned backs upon the sea, and were whirled up into the lamp-lit streets of the city. The change from the unvaried loneliness of Culm Rock to the whirl and bustle of the great town

struck Noll at once. Here were clerks going home to supper, idlers looking into the brilliant shop-windows, people of leisure strolling down for a twilight walk by the sea, drays rumbling home from the day's work, gay equipages flashing by, and the horse-cars trundling along with their crowded burden of human freight. Bells clanged musically from their towers, and the ceaseless hum of all this busy life filled the air with a cheerful undertone. There was not a hint of death or trouble anywhere. From the bustling part of the city they came into the quiet avenues, catching glimpses all along of pleasant and happy home pictures,—here a group gathered for tea, there a happy father with his children, or a party of merry little folks.

The home of the Traffords was on one of the quietest of these avenues,—a large, old-fashioned, pillared and balconied house, with ivy growing luxuriantly on its stone walls.

Noll's heart beat lighter as they entered the street. It was good to come home, he felt, even though home was to be silent and deserted. The carriage paused before the dark

and silent place. Noll's voice, as he sprang out saying, "Come, Hagar, this is *home*," was cheerier than it had been for a long time. But Hagar, as they stepped within the gate, looked up at the great and massive front of pillar, balcony, and roof, and said tremulously,—

"Lonesome as deff, chile."

"But we'll change it all presently," said Noll courageously. "When I've got the rooms lighted, and you get your tea, you'll feel differently."

He turned the key and entered; produced some matches which had been put in his pocket for this very emergency, and, to Hagar's relief, speedily flooded the hall with light.

"Now," said Noll, darting into the dark parlour and returning with a chair, "just sit here and rest you, Hagar, till I get the rest of the rooms lighted and your fire started in the kitchen. I'll come back and let you know when I'm ready."

Hagar sat down, looked about her after Noll was gone, and spying a familiar hat and

coat hanging from the rack, hid her face and began to cry. But after lamenting for awhile, a recollection of Noll down in the kitchen came to her, and she hastily dried her tears.

"Jes' like ye, Hagar," she soliloquized; "you's nuffin but a chile ob weakness, nohow. Dar's dat poor lamb down in de kitchen los' jes' as much as you hab, an' you's lettin' him bear de whole ob it. 'Spects ye don't see him a-settin' down an' cryin', an' 'strustin' ob de Lord, like ye does. Jes' keeps his lamp burnin' de whole time. Look out fur yerself, Hagar, or yer lamp'll get snuffed out; and when de Lord comes along he won't know where to find ye."

With this thought Hagar got up and went through the spacious, handsome rooms, glowing with light, down to the kitchen. Here the ruddy fire, singing tea-kettle, and sight of familiar things, raised her spirits wonderfully.

"Bress de Lord!" she exclaimed, making a stir among her pots and pans; "dis seems like gettin' out ob de wilderness into Canaan. It ain't Canaan neither, Hagar knows; but 'spects dat land ain't a great way off fur dis

ole woman, nohow. — Don't ye stay here 'mongst de clutter, Mas'r Noll. I'll hab supper fur ye up in de dinin'-room 'fore long."

At this point some of Hagar's kin, who were servants in neighbouring families, and had seen the light in her window, came to the door; and in the midst of their vehement ejaculations of joy and sympathy Noll went upstairs.

It was quiet enough in his part of the house, and the sad remembrance that it was always to be so *would* creep into his heart in spite of himself. He went slowly into the library, bound to accustom his eyes to sights which they must see every day. The books looked down from their dark cases like a host of friends. The silent and deserted organ was the hardest of all for him to look at; it seemed as if he *must* see Uncle Richard sitting there. From one dear familiar object to another he went, till he came to Uncle Richard's Bible, lying by the study-lamp. Of this Noll had many precious recollections: long pleasant Sabbath afternoons at Culm Rock, when he and the absent one had studied over it, talked of

its promises, and rejoiced in its comforting words. He took it up now with the thrill in his heart which one feels at meeting an old friend, and threw himself down in the great chair before the study-table. If his face hinted at all of what was in his heart, he found the Book a great comforter; and while he sat silently here, the gate without gave a sudden clang, a pair of swift feet came rushing up the steps, tarrying but a moment at the door; and almost before Noll had lifted his eyes from the Book, in burst this whirlwind in the shape of Ned Thorn.

Noll and the great chair came near being upset in the instant that followed.

"Oh, my conscience!" cried Ned, "how am I going to express myself? So unutterably delighted to see you once more. Give me your hand, you blessed fellow; words are good for nothing."

The speaker wrung Noll's hand till he cried out.

"There! that isn't a tithe of what I want to express.—But dear me, how white you're looking, and tired out, too! What has hap—"

The words died on Ned's lips ; for a sudden recollection of Noll's loss, driven from his mind for the minute of meeting, came back to him. His large, handsome face sobered in an instant; he dropped into a chair by Noll's side, and for a minute the two looked at each other.

"Forgive me," said Ned, looking his penitence. "I actually forgot for the minute, I was so delighted at seeing you. I was going past, and seeing the lights, and knowing that you must have returned, drove everything else out of my head.—And you are here all by yourself, trying to rest and get quiet? I'll go away this minute;" and up he jumped.

"Not for the world," exclaimed Noll; "who should I want to see, if not you?"

Ned sat down delightedly.

"I had just started for Dr. Baill's," he said, "to see if they knew when you and the doctor were coming back; and when we—; I declare," he exclaimed, jumping up again, "that makes me remember that I left Harold at the gate. I'd forgotten him entirely."

"Harold?" said Noll, smiling at such forgetfulness.

"Yes ; Harold Floyd. He's a new friend of mine,—found him since you were gone. He's splendid company, I think. Are you all alone to-night ?"

"Yes."

"Then I've a good mind to stay with you, and tell Hal to go round and let father know."

"Do !" entreated Noll.

Ned rushed out through the hall and down the steps. He wanted very much to introduce this new friend to his old one ; but to-night was not a fit time, he thought. Noll would not like to see a new face.

CHAPTER VII

FRIENDS.

NED THORN, as he came back from his errand at the gate, could have stood for an artist's model of health and perfect happiness. He had outstripped Noll in growing, though the younger; and with his added inches he had gained comeliness. Nothing could exceed the buoyancy of his spirits. Dr. Baill said that he was the greatest safeguard against melancholy that he knew of; and Ned was in as much demand in the great circle of his friends as if he had been employed for that purpose. Now, standing in the bright light by Noll's chair, his cheeks flushed a little with hurry and excitement, and looking down with the fire of his blue eye softened by the love and sympathy he felt for this friend of his, he was a pleasant picture to look at.

"Oh," said Noll, who felt this, "it's good just to look at you. I'm glad I'm to have you here to-night."

"And I'm glad you let me stay. It's a thousand times too lonely to be alone. Why in the world didn't the doctor take you home with him? I'm astonished at Dr. Baill."

"Because I wouldn't let him," said Noll; "and for once he let me have my own way. It was almost the first time since he took me under his care. He didn't even let me see—see Uncle Richard after he died."

Noll choked at the remembrance.

"Why not?" demanded Ned with a flash of his eyes.

"Because it was not safe," he said. "He was right, but it seemed hard to bear. I thought I *couldn't* bear it at first;—but all that is done with now, and I don't want to think much of it. When Uncle Dick went, it left me alone."

Ned sat down on the arm of the great chair.

"Alone!" said he; "I'd like you to prove that now. I don't see how you are alone. To

be sure I can't be a Trafford ; but I'm your friend, and what's the use of a friend if you can't make something of him when you're in trouble ? You just call me and Dr. Baill and Mr. Gray and all the rest of us nothing, do you ? ”

The tears came into Noll's eyes,—not all of them tears of sorrow by any means. Ned moved uneasily, wishing to be a comforter in the fullest sense of the word. After two or three minutes of silence he burst out with,—

“ Say, now, you dear fellow, I can't be a comforter if I try—it's no use ; but I want to tell you how sorry I am for you, and how I'd like to help you to bear your trouble. Don't think I don't care, because I'm jolly or making fun ; I can't help it. And I want to be such a friend that you won't be saying again that you're alone. Alone ! ” added Ned, with a pretended burst of indignation. “ I've a good mind to get up and go home. To be sure I'm not good for much, but then it seems to me I'm worth mentioning.”

At this point, seeing that Noll's face was getting pretty sober, Ned exclaimed,—

"Now don't look sorrowful any more, and *do* be comforted by something, if I can't do it. Don't you see how I'm trying to talk you into bright spirits? That's all I'm good for. Dr. Baill says he expects I'll die of talking at last."

"Perhaps I'm not so down-spirited as you think," said Noll; "I made up my mind for all this before I left Culm. I knew you would be kind and friendly; if I had not, it would all have been a great deal harder to do. You're the nearest friend I have in the world, unless it's Hagar."

"Now you're talking more as you ought," said Ned, with one of his happiest smiles; "and I shan't consent to be ranked below Hagar either. Just wait and see what I'll prove myself! There's boasting for you. And now let's put all these thoughts away for to-night, and settle ourselves comfortably for the evening. You shall have one big chair and I another, and if you want to read and be quiet, I'll try to keep still; but if you don't we'll have a chat, for I've about five hundred questions to ask you."

Before more could be said the tea-bell rang from the dining-room.

"What!" exclaimed Ned, "haven't you had tea yet?"

"No," said Noll, "though I had entirely forgotten the fact."

"That's a pretty state of affairs," said Ned. "I'd like to see myself forgetting my supper. Come; you're ready, aren't you? Go and eat; that is what Dr. Baill would say, and I've concluded to see that the doctor's orders are carried out the same as if he were here. Come; you'll feel rested after it."

So they went out to tea. Hagar, looking in a little while after at the picture they made,—one soberly eating his supper, while the other sat opposite, talking in his merriest and most vivacious manner,—said to herself:

"Bress dat boy! 'Spects Mas'r Noll ain't gwine to get lonesome right off."

On the whole it was a very pleasant evening, and the loneliness of the house oppressed Noll less than he had feared; and before they left the library for the night, two heads were bent over Uncle Richard's Bible, reading together.

The next day, according to promise, Noll went to see Dr. Baill, who pronounced him to be doing finely, but forbade him to go near Mr. Gray's office or to trouble his head about matters of business yet; and if to business Noll's heart had been inclined, Ned Thorn would have proved a formidable hindrance. Whether the doctor and this vivacious friend of Noll's had conspired together, was not so clear; but, at any rate, Noll was left little to himself for the first two weeks after his arrival home. Ned's devices to keep Noll's thoughts from himself and his loss were numberless. He burst in upon him at all hours of the day and evening; he persuaded away reluctance, and carried him off in triumph to his own home. The Thorn carriage Ned called for every pleasant morning, and made good use of it. At this period Noll saw Harold Floyd, Ned's new friend, a great many times. Once or twice he shared their morning ride with them, sometimes he called with Ned, and Noll's opportunities for making his acquaintance were numerous enough; but somehow, though prejudiced in his favour from the beginning, Noll could not bring himself to

like or desire Harold's presence. He was a pleasant-faced, lounging lad, well grown for his years, and evidently had had plenty of experience in the world's ways. He was never at a loss for a word nor embarrassed in any presence ; and no predicament into which he could be thrown was great enough to shake his faith in his own ability to get out of it. That Ned should have taken such a great fancy to him, surprised Noll somewhat. He asked once,—

“Where did Harold come from? Has he friends here?”

“Well,” said Ned, “to tell you the truth, I don't know where he came from. All I know is that he has an aunt at Shelly Street. I never went there though. Father don't take to him at all, and calls him an adventurer. Isn't that too hard upon him? Harold hasn't many friends, and I like him, like to befriend him too. What do you think of him?”

“I haven't seen anything unpleasant in him,” said Noll.

“Ah ; but you don't make a friend of him,” said Ned ; “I can see that. I am sorry, and don't see where the trouble is ; but I can't help it.”

Shortly after this, wishing to find out, if possible, why his two friends did not progress faster in their acquaintance, Ned said to Harold,—

“I wish you’d go up to Noll’s oftener. Don’t you like him?”

Harold’s tone was partly patronizing, partly contemptuous, as he answered,—

“Oh yes, well enough. It’s pleasant to have him around sometimes. But don’t you think he’s just a little *soft*—not much spirit, you know? The other evening when I dropped in with your note, he was curled up in a chair in the library, reading the Bible, and looking solemn as a deacon, and just about as hypocritical.”

Ned’s face flushed hot with indignation.

“Hal Floyd,” he cried, his eyes flashing as Harold had never seen them before, “if you ever speak of Noll in that way again, you and I are done with each other for ever. *Hypocrite!* I’d like to see the person that is less of one. He’s a true Christian, just as good and pure as gold,—everybody says that; and though I’m not one myself, I honour and am proud of him for it.”

"Well," said Harold good-naturedly, "don't let's quarrel about it. I'm willing you should call him the very pink of propriety; but don't get like him yourself, that's all."

The indignant blood came back to Ned's cheeks.

"Stop!—I won't hear it," he exclaimed. "I wish there were some danger of my getting like him. *You* talking about *him* like that! I tell you plainly that I'll have no more to do with you till you take back every word you've said." This Harold refused to do at first, but after a day or two, in which Ned exchanged not a word with him, he came to Handon Place, apologized in his pleasant, good-natured way, and said,—

"Let bygones be bygones."

"Yes," said Ned gladly; "I'm willing to do that. Of course, it won't make any difference with the truth whether you apologize or not, but it does with me."

In these few weeks the colour came back to Noll's cheeks, the sparkle to his eyes, and the old buoyancy and cheerfulness to his spirits; and one afternoon, having received permission

from Dr. Baill, Mr. Gray, who had had charge of the Trafford estates for many years, came down to see him. Together they went over long columns of figures, read dreary statements of expenses, loans, bonds invested, rents collected, and rents lost, till Noll, pushing back his chair, laughed, and exclaimed,—

“No more this time, Mr. Gray, please, or I shall be able to keep none of it in my head. Have I got to go through all that great ledger?”

“That is as you please,” said the lawyer, pausing in his work. “If you wish to prove the correctness of all my accounts, it will be necessary.”

“But, Mr. Gray—”

“Well?”

“Father and Uncle Richard and the others all trusted to you; why can’t I? I’d like to know the value of the whole,—all that is left; and since I am not to have charge of the rest, why should I puzzle over it just now?”

“You need not unless you choose,” said Mr. Gray; “but suppose that I should take it into my head to be dishonest?”

Noll looked sceptical as to the danger of such an event occurring.

"Well," said the lawyer, "you can come down to my office some leisure day, and we will finish the rest of them; and now I have a little business of another kind. You will not, of course, think of keeping this house and living in this solitary way?"

"Why?" said Noll.

"Too secluded altogether—not society enough by half," said Mr. Gray. "Now I have received for you two offers of a home, magnificent offers I call them; but, first of all, I want to make you a like proposal myself. If you could find me and my home at Beaker Square congenial to you, I shall be rejoiced to have you come. It's not so quiet a place as this; there's a good deal of company generally, and maybe it would please you. I certainly hope it may; for since that morning when first you started for that mysterious Culm Rock—almost a head shorter than you are now—I've thought it would be pleasant to see you always at my home. But I mustn't be unjust to the others. The first is from Dr. Baill. He says you are like an own son to him. If you will come, you will be treated and regarded as such. He says, 'Tell

Noll that though he may have a good many better offers, none can be more sincere than mine.' The other is from Mr. Thorn. He sent me a line begging that I would present the offer to you as favourably as possible, and saying that, after I had done so, Ned would appear to argue the case in person, which I have no doubt he will do most eloquently. Now, I am not going to prejudice you in favour of any of these offers. When you have decided, I should like to know. I've got a business engagement to meet in ten minutes, and must bid you good afternoon."—Mr. Gray and his books went out. Somebody must have been watching, for hardly had the lawyer shut the gate before Ned Thorn came in.

"Smells of old ledgers here," said he with a merry twinkle of his eye.

Noll laughed.

"I'd like to know what freemasonry there is between you and Mr. Gray," said he. "You seem to understand each other pretty well."

"To be sure; we work in harmony. He told you I was going to argue my case in person, didn't he? Now I'm here, and the

time has come, every argument that I'd prepared has flown out of my head. I'm desperate. All I can do is just to say that you know father and you know me, and can judge whether we are in earnest about this thing. There's only two of us up in that great house, and if you'll come and make the third, I promise you that you shall never be lonely again."

Ned's voice toward the last grew intense with earnestness. A silence followed, Noll feeling in his grateful heart that these friends offered him a hundredfold more than he deserved. What answer could he make?

"Ned," said he at last, "I should feel ashamed to say anything so poor as 'Thank you' for your offer. You make me feel humble with your kindness; and oh, what can I answer? I can't decide now, for I've three to consider, you know."

Ned's suddenly sobered face expressed his disappointment.

"Well," said he at last, "it's a little better than to have you say no, but not much; and now don't go to keeping me long in suspense."

CHAPTER VIII

CHOOSING BETWEEN PLEASURE AND DUTY.

THREE or four days elapsed before Noll came to a decision in regard to the offers which had been made him. Any of them was tempting enough. He had seen enough of the doctor's home to remember everything pertaining to it with pleasure. There was also the additional inducement in the fact that he had been Uncle Richard's well-beloved friend. Of the lawyer's home Noll knew less, but knew Mr. Gray well enough to feel certain of a cordial welcome.

But the offer of the Thorns was the most tempting of all. Over this Noll lingered and hesitated long, wishing that he could see no shirking of duty in the acceptance of it. He wanted to accept, oh, so much! The thought of a home with Ned gave him unmixed pleas-

ure, and he would have rejoiced to have seen nothing in the way of giving himself such great happiness. But, after considering the whole, and remembering the solemn promise he had made beside Uncle Richard's grave, Noll put away all thoughts of changing his home, and decided against all three of the offers. None of them included Hagar. It was not to be expected that strangers would wish to burden themselves with an old black servant getting well into years; he knew that, and remembering all that Hagar had done for him and his, all her love and faithfulness for Uncle Richard, all her strong, passionate attachment to himself, he thought, "It will be cruel for me to go away where she cannot see me. I never could be happy after rewarding her faithfulness with such ingratitude." And wishing to keep his promise bright, and feeling that now he was called upon to make a sacrifice for another's happiness, he made the decision final by going with it to Mr. Gray. It was not done without a struggle, and it came as a severe trial of his purpose to live for others. Whatever he might have conjectured as possible

trials of his resolution, the thought that he should be called upon to sacrifice a delightful home for its sake had never occurred to him. He had reason enough to ask Christ's help on the morning when he went down to Mr. Gray.

It was in his heart all the way,—the constant, earnest cry for the Lord's strength and comfort in this time of temptation.

"What!" exclaimed the lawyer when he was told, "accepted none of them!"

"No," said Noll.

Mr. Gray looked perplexed and somewhat displeased.

"Perhaps you didn't think them worth accepting," he said a little tartly.

"You are wrong there," said Noll quickly; "any one of them was a great deal more than I deserve."

"Then," said the lawyer, "what is the matter with them?"

Noll was silent at first, not feeling sure that Mr. Gray would quite understand his reason if told; but the man's keen eyes looked at him so persistently that after a minute of hesitation he disclosed all.

"Well—really," began Mr. Gray, "I cannot—I must say I cannot—see the matter in this light. I don't think you are called upon, at your age, to sacrifice so much for this old black woman. Excuse me, but really I can't help smiling at the thought."

Noll was sober enough, however.

"You don't know Hagar, Mr. Gray," he said. "She has lived in our family from a little girl. Uncle Richard was like a son to her. She has left her own people again and again to do for him and me; and now that the time has come I don't mean to leave her."

"Very true," said the lawyer; "I appreciate your motives: but it seems to me you forget altogether the vast distance between your station and Hagar's. She is only a black servant,—broken down and decrepit; you can enter the highest society in the city if you choose."

"There didn't seem to be such a great difference in our station when we were sick at Culm Rock, and there was no one but her to call upon," said Noll.

"Very well," said Mr. Gray, "of course I

shall not press the matter. You doubtless have considered the whole subject well before deciding; but I cannot help telling you that the result disappoints me exceedingly. I'm afraid you have made a mistake."

"I've done what I thought was right," said Noll; and then he added earnestly, "Now, when you give my decision to the doctor and Mr. Thorn, please tell them how grateful I am for their offers, and how much I thank them."

"Certainly," said Mr. Gray. "I don't see that there can be any complaining, since you have served us all alike."

Noll's heart felt lighter now that the matter was really settled. But the hardest of all was to meet Ned Thorn's reproaches.

"When I got Mr. Gray's note," said Ned, "saying that 'for weighty reasons you had concluded,' etc., etc., I was so vexed and disappointed, that I tore it up. I wouldn't believe it. Then I got my cap, and started for here, to see what the 'weighty reasons' are.—Because you don't like us? I can't think of anything else."

"O Ned!" said Noll, "you *know* better

than that. Don't be hard with me; for it cost me struggle enough to give it up."

"It did?" said Ned incredulously; "and your reason?"

"I can't cast off Hagar."

Ned walked to the library window and stayed there several minutes, his back turned toward Noll. When he returned, his blue eyes had grown soft, and there was a suspicion of moisture on their lashes.

"I suppose," said he, "that this is what you call doing your duty. It's hard enough, and it costs me something as well as you; but if you think it's right, I'll not urge you any more."

"O Ned!" said Noll, "I knew you would understand me better than Mr. Gray did." He grasped Ned's hand and pressed it gratefully.

Ned soberly sat down. "You *do* go so deep into things," he said, with something as like a sigh as possible for such a merry person. "Now, if I had been in your place, I suppose I should have accepted the offer that promised the most comfort and pleasure, without a

thought about a servant or the right and wrong of the matter. There's the difference between us; and I feel it just now as I never did before. I go skimming along over everything that's pleasant and easy, without a thought of anything else; but you just take hold of all the hard and bitter things that come into your life and grapple with them; and though you don't have half so comfortable a time as I, I suspect you are laying up what good old Father Prescott would call 'treasures in heaven.'"

Ned had never spoken in this way before, and Noll had never seen him so thoroughly sobered.

"I don't have many bitter things," Noll began; but Ned interrupted with,—

"I can see for myself what you have. You don't go round telling your troubles, but stay at home and have your struggle with them. That's what I like; and it sets me to wondering whether I'm ever to be anything but an idle, careless, good-time-loving fellow. I don't suppose all the hard things ought to be in your life, and none in mine."

"Yes, they had," said Noll, "if God thinks best."

Ned's face brightened into a smile. "Wouldn't it look droll," said he, "to see me taking some thought for other people's happiness?"

"No," said Noll; "for I've seen you do it too many times to have it seem odd at all."

"Pshaw! A little. Something that was no trouble at all, or something that I liked to do,—never anything that I did *not* like to do, mind you. Well, it won't do any good to talk. I've got your decision, and though I'm terribly disappointed, I like you better than ever for it. Oh, if you only *could* have accepted, Noll!"

"*If* I only could!" said Noll with a bright face.

Ned picked up his cap. "I must go back, I guess," he said; "for father isn't well this afternoon. He doesn't go down to the office much now, and likes to have me with him. Won't you go back with me?"

"Yes, but for that great ledger of Mr. Gray's. I must wade a good ways further in it before night."

They went out through the hall together, Noll following on to the gate, where both paused in the pleasant sunshine.

"I like these days," said Ned, stretching out his hands in the warm air. "Just consent to come home with me, and we'll order the carriage."

"No; I must go back to that ledger directly," said Noll. "But wait just a minute; there's something I want to say. Ned, dear fellow, why go any longer without giving your heart to Jesus, and trying to serve him?"

The question did not come from Noll's lips without a slight effort, fearful a little that it might not be well received.

Ned raised his eyes kindly and pleasant.

"I feel just now, for this afternoon, as if I would like to serve him," he said seriously; "but where will it all be to-morrow? I shall be running about wild and careless as ever. Don't trouble your heart about me, you dear Noll, for it's full enough already."

"Not so full but that I shall pray for you till you *do* give yourself to him," said Noll.

Ned turned, an indescribable expression

flitting over his face, and smiling back good-bye, went down the street, the kindly autumn sunshine seeming to follow and linger about his comely figure.

Noll, looking after, little knew that his sacrifice upon the altar of Duty had made an impression upon Ned's heart which nothing ever effaced. He saw only that he was a little more sober and quiet than usual, and went back to his ledger with the new prayer for his friend's welfare warm and fervent in his heart.

With the coming of the warm and sunshiny autumn Noll made preparations for entering upon his studies again. His love for natural science growing with every day, it was with delight that he heard of an opening for one in Professor Bayler's class, at the university. He had long looked forward with delight to the time when he might study the Earth's secrets under the wise professor; and now that time had come, if he could only pass a successful examination. When he went to confer with Dr. Baill about it, the doctor shook his head, saying,—

"Don't be very sure of success, for the professor is pretty severe in his questions; he'll trip you up if he can. I know the little man well; and unless he is certain that people have the love of rocks and stones born in them, he's pretty sure to keep them out of his class."

But Noll was not entirely discouraged, and shortly afterwards the doctor received the following note :—

"DEAR DOCTOR,—I have got the place, and am going to work next Monday. There were three of us tried for it, and I was successful. The professor was very good to me.

"NOLL TRAFFORD."

This news gave the doctor as much pleasure as if it had been a success of his own Johnny's; and when he afterward met Noll in the street, returning from school, his pride and delight were expressed.

Noll entered into this new life with keen enjoyment, ambitious to make his way with the best of the professor's pupil's, and keeping

his resolution to make somebody happy all the while bravely in sight. For instance, there was Kepler, a fellow-student, who, besides his poverty, was so unfortunate as to be very lame. It seemed to Noll as if he looked lamer and more poverty-pinched every day. By-and-by there began to be hints that he had got to drop from the class for want of means to continue his studies; but suddenly, to everybody's surprise and Kepler's amazement, a lawyer of the name of Gray called at his room one day to leave a small roll of bills; and informed him that he could receive the same amount every quarter by calling at 67 Court Street. Kepler kept on with his studies, the colour came back to his cheeks, and a better coat to his back, and for a long time the whole matter remained a profound secret, until (every member of the class but Noll having denied the generosity, and the fact coming to light that Mr. Gray had charge of the Trafford estates) suspicion fell with certainty upon the new scholar. But Noll would have very little to say about the matter, and to Kepler's thanks replied,—

"Don't call it a sacrifice, for it wasn't. If I had pinched myself to do it, it would have been different; but I didn't. I shall not have one comfort the less for doing it; and as long as I could so easily, I think you had more right to the money than I."

Kepler said this was a kind of argument which he was not much accustomed to.

After this, Noll's way into the kind opinion and regard of the class was insured. They were all older than he, some of them men in stature, and naturally enough at first inclined to regard him as beneath their notice or attention; but after the name of Kepler's benefactor had come to light, and after a few weeks' recitations, all this was as if it had not been. Noll took his place high in their regards, with a firm intention to hold good his place there; he meant to make them all friends, and to carry out in every day of his life the good will and good deeds which should make them glad that he had lived.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEW WORLD OF SCHOOL.

A SANDY-HAIRED, mild-faced German was Professor Bayler, with genial, pleasant ways, and by no means looking the wise scholar he was. Away from his books and study he seemed a quiet, dull, good-natured little man, with very few ideas, and no inclination to talk about them ; among his friendly books or before his class he was altogether another person. He allowed neither idling nor lagging ; the laggards were left behind or thrown out entirely. His eyes were quick to discern the capabilities of a new-comer, and alas for him if he did not take hold of work with spirit and enthusiasm ! But for all that the professor required much, and tolerated nothing in the likeness of a drone, he had the liking and respect of all his students.

He animated them with his own enthusiasm ; and, sifted as it always was of drones and idlers, the class was ready to follow wherever the professor led. Into this company of smart, energetic students Noll stepped, with a resolve to hold his place good among them, if study and application could do it.

Now Professor Bayler had a horror of white-faced, melancholy boys, and was not quite sure, when Noll first made his appearance, that his new pupil was not one of them ; but after a day or two had elapsed, and he had heard Noll's clear, hearty laugh, and seen with what zest he entered into sport or entertainment, his fears vanished, and he began to entertain a liking for the tall, quiet lad, who invariably had good lessons, understood them perfectly, and was so ready with an illustration. But the matter of good lessons was not the only reason for the professor's decided favour toward the new-comer from the first. Over the sea, in quiet Göttingen, the professor had left a motherless boy of his own. Carl was only a blue-eyed, flaxen-haired little child when the father departed to seek support for them both.

But when Noll made his appearance, something made the professor's heart stir with a recollection of his own lad at home. For this boy the famous professor was suffering exile,—toiling late and early, living economically, denying himself everything but necessities, that Carl might have no advantage of books or study denied him: for the blue-eyed child, a well-grown lad now, had already entered upon his course at the renowned university where his father had studied before him. When Carl's education was completed,—when the cause of all this toil and labour existed no longer,—then the professor would go home. Go home, never to leave again the dim and peaceful shadows of the university. But all this was a secret hidden in the professor's breast, or at least a subject upon which he never spoke. His brother professors supposed him to be without "kith or kin;" and the bright picture which the man had made for himself, of Carl learned and famous, and of a quiet old age among his books, was revealed to no one—until Noll came. What it was that led the professor to drop the mask for once, and show this warm, bright side

of his life, Noll was puzzled to know. It all seemed to happen naturally enough,—Noll sitting in one of the windows of the recitation-room with his books, during intermission, when the professor, passing through, caught sight of him, and paused as if pleased with the picture.

“Ah,” he said, turning slowly about, while a warm colour stole into his face, “I have a boy at home—Göttingen—something like you, I have hope.”

Noll's face showed his surprise.

“Why, I thought you—,” he began.

“You thought I had nobody,” said the professor, smiling pleasantly. “Everybody thinks wrong. I have Carl,—getting as big as you by this time, I think.”

The professor suddenly stood before Noll in a new light,—a man who loved something besides science. Somehow there was at once a new sympathy between them. Noll ventured to ask a few questions about the lad over the sea; and the professor, with a new look in his eyes, sat down and more than answered them. He even went so far as to take a letter out of

his pocket, and translate what Carl had last written, his mild blue eyes growing softer and softer as he read, till, as he paused at the end, they were almost tearful.

"Carl is a brave fellow," he said; "he is not like some German students I know, smoking away his time and fighting duels; he will not keep his poor father away from home any longer than he can help. Ah! I fear I am not as brave as he," said the poor professor with a sigh.

This glimpse into the inner life of a man whom he had supposed too great and famous, too busy and absorbed in his profession, to be troubled by the little matters which gave other people pain and heartache, touched Noll exceedingly. He wondered what he could do to make the professor's life pleasanter.

"And then—when Carl's education is finished—you will go back?" said Noll.

"Yes—home! Carl will make himself a name, and I shall rest. There is no place like home to rest."

As he said this, the professor settled himself back comfortably in his chair, and folded his

arms as if he already had a foretaste of the happy days to come. Just then the steps of students sounded without the door, and lo! the professor was himself again,—mild-faced, pleasant-voiced, but nothing more. Noll could easily have believed that he had been dreaming all this, but for conversations which afterward took place.

The mild and sunny autumn faded into winter. Noll kept steadily at his books, liking his life exceedingly, and making himself liked by all with whom he came in contact at the university. It was no longer hard to see that the professor made a great friend of him; but there was no jealousy among less-favoured pupils. Young Trafford deserved it, the older fellows said. But though finding his school-life so pleasant, Noll's principles brought him a cross to bear sometimes. This was to be expected, coming in contact with so many who did not acknowledge God for a master, nor govern their lives by the counsels of his Word. One day, when a party of students were in the hall, Kepler came limping in with a book in his hand, saying,—

"Who's lost a Bible? I found this in the recitation-room window."

That was where Noll had left it.

"Seems to me that's rather a rare article for this locality," said Atkins, one of the older students, taking it from Kepler's hand. "Who's lost a Bible?"

Several laughingly denied the ownership of it.

"Well," said Atkins, "this is funny. I wonder who's turned saint? Who's lost a Bible?"

At this point Noll noticed, for the first time, the question that had been put. He turned with a slightly flushed face, saying,—

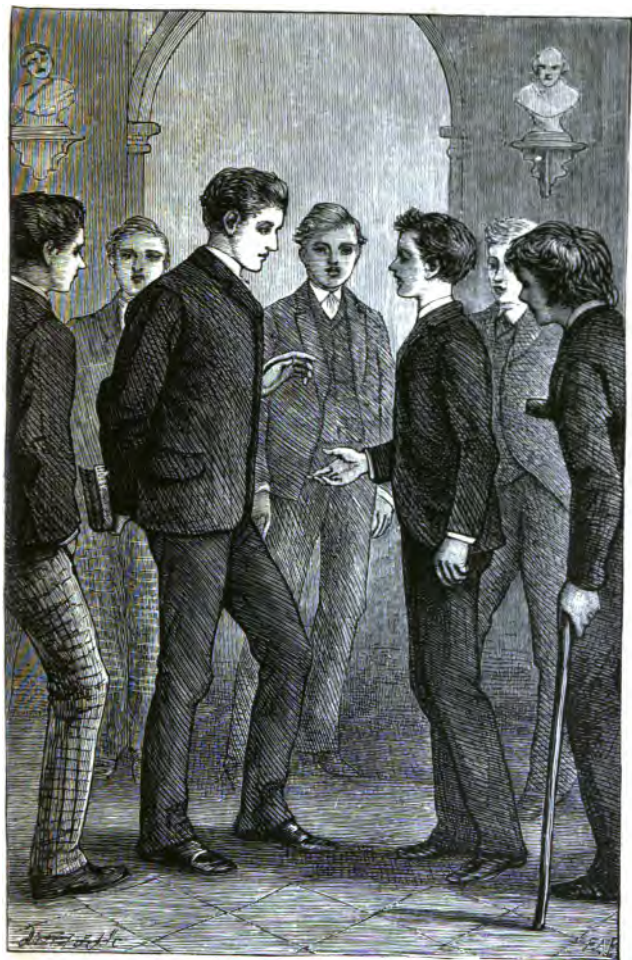
"That is mine, Atkins."

All eyes were turned upon him.

"Yours!" said Atkins, affecting a surprise he did not feel; "what on earth were you doing with a Bible?"

"Reading in it," said Noll, colouring under the steady stare of so many eyes.

"Reading in it! What for, pray?" said Atkins, in a tone that was almost sneering.



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"I should like the book, if you please," said Noll quietly.

"Then tell me what you were reading in it for?" persisted Atkins.

"Shame!"—"No compulsion!" came from the crowd.

Noll's reply was quick and clear,—

"I read because I needed what was in it," he said; "if you'll keep it, and read it, I won't ask for it back."

"Thank you," said Atkins, with a slight flush. "I wouldn't like to take it on those terms." He then handed the book back.

"Oh," said Kepler, coming up with a distressed face, "forgive me, Trafford! If I had known it was yours, I shouldn't have said a word."

The bright colour rushed into Noll's cheeks.

"Do you think I'm *ashamed* to acknowledge my Bible?" he cried; "there is no reason why they should not all know."

A little murmur of something like applause sounded in the hall. If Noll had flinched or wavered, or shown the slightest symptom of striking his colours to the enemy, they would

have shown him no mercy; as it was, he increased their respect for his Bible and himself. This little incident was one of many that occurred during the winter,—none of them remembered long by any one, but all going to show Noll's position, and whether his lamp was burning brightly.

About the middle of the university term, Noll, after a long hesitation, ventured to ask Professor Bayler home to tea with him one night. He was quite sure that the professor, for some unknown reason, failed to get the same attentions which were given to brother professors. Noll had never known him to go out to a dinner or tea party; he was always busy in the laboratory, or poring over books in his little room. With a good deal of doubt as to its acceptance, the invitation was given, and the pleasure of the giver was great when the professor replied,—

“Thank you; I will come. I shall be glad to see where you live.”

If the professor did not enjoy his tea and the evening that followed, it was no fault of Noll's. Hagar made the table shine with the old-

fashioned family plate, and took a vast deal of pride in the viands she spread. When tea was over, and the professor had settled himself comfortably in an easy-chair by the fire, he looked around the room, rubbed his hands a little with pleasure, and then said,—

“ Carl and I will live so—some time.”

This pleasant little event in the professor's monotonous life had the effect which Noll desired. It was not a difficult matter to persuade him to come again, and the warm-hearted German found his pupil's home so attractive, in contrast with his dreary little room, that at last he began to look forward to his tea and cheery evening with genuine delight. He found it convenient to call there frequently, sometimes for a book, oftener because he was lonely, and never failed to bring down Carl's letters as soon as they came, that Noll might share in the pleasure of reading them. In this way Noll and the German lad across the sea came to be quite well acquainted; and but for Noll's poor German and Carl's poorer English, letters would have passed between them. As it was, the professor was obliged to act as

interpreter, which he was only too glad to do.

About this time, when winter was hinting of warmer winds and sunnier clouds not far in the future, Noll became dimly aware that something had happened to Ned Thorn. What it was he could not even surmise; but somehow a change made itself gradually apparent,—a change that troubled instead of pleased Noll. The first thing noticeable was the long time which began to elapse between Ned's visits. Instead of bursting in in his merry way morn, noon, or night, as it happened, he came only at long intervals, and then much as if duty, not inclination, prompted him. There seemed to be a cloud over his merriness, and he was constrained and ill at ease. Noll felt all this at once, and endeavoured in vain to find its cause. He could not remember anything on his part which could have caused offence. Study and hard work in school had taken a great deal of time which once had been given to Ned, but nothing else could he remember that might lead to coldness or estrangement. He waited a week or two patiently, hoping that

the cloud would wear away ; but it only grew greater. Sitting in the great library alone one evening, and wishing he could hear Ned's quick step on the walk, Noll wondered whether it would not be a good plan to wait no longer, but go and see Ned. This, after a minute's hesitation, he decided to do. It was only a short walk up the avenue to Handon Place, and he went quickly. At sight of his familiar face, the servant showed him at once into the library, where Mr. Thorn, getting to be quite an invalid, sat. The merchant gave him a cordial welcome, but as soon as Ned's name was mentioned looked sadly into the fire.

"He's not at home," he said sighing ; "it's no use to look for him here of an evening now-a-days,—not even though I desire his company. Another's presence is preferred to mine."

"May I ask whose?" said Noll, with a suspicion that he knew already.

"Harold Floyd," said Mr. Thorn bitterly ; "he is going to be the ruin of Ned. I can feel and see the change already. They are gone every night—I don't know where. Words

are of no use: either Ned will not listen, or that crafty Floyd will destroy the effect of all I say. Noll, can't you—won't you help me?"

The merchant turned in his chair with a look that showed how his heart was troubled.

"I'll be glad enough to help you," said Noll, "if I can; and I shall try hard enough for it."

He wondered whether Floyd's influence over Ned was greater than his own. It did not seem quite possible, but he would test the matter and see. Ned should not go over into the enemy's hands without a struggle to prevent it. And God was on his side,—that was a great comfort; and Ned, for whom he had prayed God so long, would yet be turned from evil influences. He would allow his heart to entertain no other conclusion.

CHAPTER X.

TROUBLED FOR OTHERS.

NOLL, a few days after the conversation with Mr. Thorn, came home from recitations one night, pained and troubled by a revelation which the afternoon had made concerning Professor Bayler. He made haste to get into the quiet of the library, where he might think the whole matter over by himself; and pushing open the door with a sad face, was surprised to find Ned Thorn ensconced in one of the great chairs.

"O Ned," said he, "I'm glad to find you here. When did you come?"

"An hour ago," said Ned, without looking up.

Taking a second look, Noll perceived at once that his friend was in trouble. His face was sad, his eyes downcast, and there was nothing

merry or even cheerful in his presence ; and looking, Noll's own trouble was forgotten in that of his friend. He laid down his books, and went up to the easy-chair.

"You're in trouble, Ned ? Tell me about it ; won't you ?"

Ned sighed long and heavily.

"I'm ashamed to come here," he said, speaking with an effort ; "but there's no other place. I *am* in trouble, and I don't see but what I always shall be. There's no pleasure for me now-a-days, anyhow."

"Why ?" said Noll, sitting down on the arm of the chair.

"I thought you would ask me that," said Ned almost petulantly. "I'm tired of reasons ; but if you must have one, I suppose that it's a good deal my fault and partly somebody else's fault that I'm in trouble."

"I'm sorry," Noll said. "It seems strange to see you looking troubled and sad. Are you going to tell me all about it ?"

"Of course," said Ned, with something like the old manner ; "who else can I tell ? Things are getting worse and worse between father

and me every day, and I don't see what we are coming to. It's gone far enough already," he added, with a tremble in his voice.

Noll waited patiently for him to go on.

"Last night," continued Ned, "Harold and I were out a little later than usual, and he said that his aunt at Shelly Street would not sit up for him, so I asked him to come home with me. When we got there, father was sitting up, for all it was so late, and I never saw him so angry in my life. He said that if Harold stayed, he should seek a resting-place somewhere else. Of course, Hal had to go. I was indignant and angry; and father said a hundred bitter things about me, and,—O dear! it was terrible. The consequence is, the doctor said father was a great deal worse this morning, and that it was all owing to excitement and trouble. That made me feel bad all the forenoon; and what should we do but get to talking about Harold again this afternoon; and I got angry and said things I ought not to, till father told me to go out of his sight. Then I got my cap and rushed down here to you."

Whatever angry feelings were in Ned's heart

when he started, they seemed now to have given place to sorrow.

"O Noll," he said, leaning his head against his friend, "I'm almost wild thinking of it. We used to have such happy times—father and I; and he never spoke a stern word to me before."

Noll's distress at this turn of affairs was evident enough.

"I would go back and ask his forgiveness before another hour passed," he said earnestly. "I would have everything right once more, and then *never* let anything come between you again. O Ned, just think of him, ill and in pain, troubled so about you!"

Ned did think, and shut his eyes to keep the tears from slipping out.

"And," ventured Noll, thinking that it ought to be said, "if you must choose between your father and Harold, why not do it at once?"

"I don't see why I need," said Ned. "Father is unjust to Harold, and I mean to stick to him."

"Even if you lose a father?"

Ned stamped with impatience, and, leaving his chair, walked to the window. Noll kept his place, resolving to be patient and influence his friend for the right, even though he must bear some hard things in consequence. But Ned's vexation was of short duration. He came back, his handsome face sad enough, and his voice choking a little, as he said,—

"I believe I'm getting to be a brute, with no thought for anybody. Forgive me, Noll; and I'm going to do as you say, and ask father's forgiveness at once."

"Now you seem like Ned Thorn once more," said Noll joyfully. "Don't fail to make everything right between you, and don't give any more cause for trouble."

A heavier shadow came over Ned's face. "I can't give up Harold entirely," he said, "if that is what you mean by 'cause for trouble.' Father need *not* ask me to."

"Don't talk so," said Noll: "your father misses you very much, now that he is confined to the house; and doesn't your time belong more to him than to any one else? O Ned, don't go to laying up sorrow for yourself."

"There's no need," said Ned, "for I've got all I can bear without. I don't know what's to become of me. I'm no good to anybody, anyhow!"

This decision Noll could hardly dissuade him from. At last, weary of the attempt, he said,—

"Well, if you're *not* good for anything, as you say, then go and *make* yourself good for something, Ned. You've got a chance to make your father and a host of friends happy, and it is for you to say whether they shall be so or not."

Ned was silent for a minute, thinking of this, then rose to go.

"I'll go back and see father at once," he said, as if afraid his resolution would desert him if dallied with; "but as for promises of anything more or better, I can't make them. Thank you, Noll, and good-bye."

He went out hurriedly, and all Noll could do was to pray that God would go with him and keep his feet from straying. Then, when the sound of footsteps had died away, the remembrance of his own trouble came back to

him. His respect and affection for Professor Bayler had been shocked by the discovery, made accidentally, that with all his wisdom and learning, this man acknowledged no God, denied the existence of one, and attributed the wonderful laws of his own science to nothing but some vague, undetermined force in nature.

When this revelation came to Noll, he was standing in a group of students, listening to some remarks the professor was making about a new specimen which had just been obtained, and in spite of himself the irrepressible words burst out,—“Professor Bayler, don’t you believe in God?”

The question, and the startled tone in which it was spoken, produced a silence at once. The professor turned about with a sharp answer for the questioner; but seeing who his interrogator was, he paused, hesitated for a moment, and said at last,—“No, my friend; Nature is my God.”

Noll turned away to hide something in his eyes very like tears.

“See,” laughed Atkins to his comrades,

"Trafford has got more than he can swallow this time. I wonder if he'll worship the professor after this?"

But they got no more remarks that time; for, laying down his specimens, the professor followed Noll into the recitation-room. He found him standing before one of the tall windows, and as he entered Noll did not turn.

"Ah," said the professor, coming up and laying a hand on his shoulder, "forgive me, my friend. I have shocked you, I fear. You say nothing to me, and you look away!"

Noll turned, just enough for the professor to see that his eyes were full, and that he was in no condition to speak. The warm-hearted German was distressed at once.

"You shall forgive me," he cried; "I did not think to trouble you. I have no heart to make you pain; ah, no! You shall forgive me!"

"I can't forgive you for denying God," said Noll rather tremulously.

"No? You cannot? So! But you must forgive me for something," said the professor entreatingly.

At this point the bell rang for recitations, and there was not time for another word. Directly after recitations Noll went home; and here in the silent library he now sat, sorrowfully thinking of the professor's words. Twilight gathered fast without, and stealing in made the room shadowy. Noll lighted the lamp, and went about from one duty to another, with a grave, abstracted face, thinking only of one thing, and, after turning the matter over again and again, coming to but one conclusion. He would make the professor more of a friend than ever; he would use his influence in every way to draw the wise man's heart away from his terrible theory. But how hopeless the case looked, after all! What could he, Noll Trafford, do that would affect such a great and learned man as the professor? Nothing himself, perhaps; but God could help him to do everything, he remembered. And into God's hands Noll at once put both his friends,—the great professor and troubled Ned Thorn. Thinking of Ned after tea, he began to be afraid that the reconciliation might not be effected after all, or that Harold might per-

suade away Ned's good inclinations, and induce him to spend the evening from home. Hoping to prevent such a danger, he put aside his books and started for Ned's.

Nearing the hedge-gate at Handon Place, he caught the sound of familiar voices; and as he came up to the little wicket, found Harold already there, talking with his friend. Ned's voice, as he spoke, showed his relief at Noll's appearance.

"Glad to see you, Noll! Come in.—I can't go to-night, Hal, you see, for Noll doesn't come to see me very often."

Harold lingered a minute or two, and then his footsteps echoed discontentedly down the street.

"Did you really think of going away to-night?" said Noll, with some reproach in his tone.

"I—I was tempted to," said Ned, with a slight shiver; "Hal urged pretty hard. O Noll, I don't know what is going to become of me! I can't resist his words somehow, and I wish—just a little—that I had never seen him, and then I should never have had this

trouble with father. But don't stand out here any longer. We'll go in, and for once have a happy evening."

And a happy evening it was for father, son, and friend; happiest for the father, perhaps, because he thought he saw the promise of his son's return to better companionship.

The lagging winter, without warning, suddenly burst into the full warmth and brightness of spring. The university term closed for a brief period, and Noll had a few days of rest and recreation, which Dr. Baill said he needed badly enough. And those spring days brought an event to which Noll had long been looking forward with conscious longing, and yet with questioning when he remembered its solemnness. He became a member of the church of which his father had once been pastor, and to which the gray-haired, saintly-faced Father Prescott ministered. At the time of his father's death Noll was considered a child of the church; it cared for him until he left Hastings. When he came back to live in his old home, it was to find that he was not forgotten, and that the home-like old church and

its people remembered him kindly. And so, when the gray-haired old servant of God pronounced the solemn words which made him a member of Christ's visible Church, hearts were stirred and eyes filled at the thoughts which the boy's earnest face, so like his dead father's, called to remembrance. Noll's fellow-students, most of whom came out of curiosity, went home soberly enough, Atkins saying,—

“Though I don't believe in all this, it's a solemn thing to hear a fellow take such vows upon himself. And in Trafford's case you can know he means what he says,—you could see it in his eyes there this afternoon. Though I've made fun of him sometimes, I believe he's true gold,—none of your sham, you know,—and sure to get a reward, if anybody does.”

Poor Kepler, limping along, said,—

“Makes a fellow feel as if he wanted some other God besides Nature; don't it, Atkins?—just a little dissatisfied with himself, you know!”

“Mind your own affairs,” said Atkins tartly; “I'm not dissatisfied with myself.”

And Professor Bayler, sceptic though he

was, looked down on the scene with a serious light in his keen eyes, and caught himself wondering whether these intent worshippers below, and the boy who stood before them with such high faith and purpose, had not got nearer the truth than he. He felt a new respect for this thing which the world called religion, for the reason that Noll had accepted it. He knew that he had accepted its principles with all his heart and soul; there was no doubting, no hesitation, no wavering. The professor *knew* this, and of that fact was born the first doubt of his own sceptical theory. Could so much faith be hung upon nothing?

Going out of the ivied old church into the quiet sunshine of the Sabbath afternoon, his heart felt those yearnings after something sure and steadfast, something immortal to build hopes upon beyond the shadowy shores of death, which all human hearts must feel, even though they deny God.

CHAPTER XI.

MY FRIEND BEFORE MYSELF.

A SHORT time after the event of the preceding chapter, on one of the mild spring evenings, Noll was standing by the gate, hoping to see Ned Thorn's figure come down the avenue. For some reason unknown to him, Ned had not been to see him since one evening a few nights before the Sabbath of his admission to the church. He had called twice at Handon Place to find Ned absent, the last time leaving word for his friend to come and see him; but as yet no Ned had appeared, and Noll began to fear that Harold had regained his old influence, and that matters were going ill up at the great mansion. Pushing open the gate he went slowly down the avenue, which was silvered here and there with light from the

young moon that was sailing over the spires, thinking that if he did not meet his friend on the way he would go up to Handon Place. But before he had turned out of his own street, he spied Ned's familiar figure slowly coming down. Noll waited for him to come up, suspecting at once that something had happened when he saw his friend's lagging step.

"Ned," said he cheerily, as the figure came into the shadow of the elms where he was standing, "you walk as if you had been doing a hard day's work."

"I have," said Ned shortly.

"Then come home with me and get rested," said Noll taking his arm. "You were going to my house, of course. I've been looking for you a good while."

But Ned hung back, saying,—

"I don't know as I ought. I had not decided to."

"Such an answer sounds strangely from you," said Noll. "Of course you are going home with me! I can't think of your doing any other way, so come on."

They walked slowly back along the dimly-

lighted way, Ned as silent as if he had vowed never to speak more. Noll knew at once that there had been trouble again. Through the gate and into the ivied porch they went, when Ned threw himself down in a sad, discouraged kind of way, still without saying a word.

"Come, Ned," said Noll, after a little silence; "you're in trouble again, and I want to help you with it. I'm afraid you don't give me the confidence you once did. You hold yourself further off, somehow; but you wouldn't if you knew how much I want to help you."

"It's you that's getting further off—not I," said Ned rather coldly.

"Why," said Noll in amazement, "what do you mean?"

"Just what I said: you're getting further and further away from me every day of your life. I don't feel free to come to you as I did once; and now you've joined the church, and put another great wall between yourself and me."

For half a minute Noll was silent with astonishment at this intelligence. Then he exclaimed,—

"Why, Ned Thorn, think of what an absurd thing you're saying! Further off from you? It seems to me I'm a great deal nearer; at any rate I ought to be. What is the reason you don't feel free to come to me? I've never refused to listen or to help you. O Ned,"—his voice trembling with sudden earnestness,—
"all the vows to serve Christ which I can take upon me will only make you nearer to me. Now tell me your trouble, for you *know* I'm eager to help you if I can."

But Ned was perverse, and continued,—

"You can't feel for me when I go astray and get into trouble, for you never go astray yourself. What do you know about doing wrong? Precious little! I feel sometimes as if you were too good to have anything to do with such a fellow as I am."

Noll made no reply, thinking that in his secret heart Ned did not believe what he was saying. He would say no more till his perverse mood was gone. So the moonlight and the ivy had the silence all to themselves, and between them both they drew a strange pattern of light and shadow on the floor that danced

and fluttered in every breath of breeze. By-and-by the bells chimed for eight. After they were still, a much-softened voice said,—

“Noll.”

“Well?”

“Come over here, please.”

Noll crossed over to his side of the porch and sat down. Ned laid his head on his friend's shoulder, like a tired child.

“It's no use,” he said sorrowfully; “I never shall be Ned Thorn again though I try. Once I would no more have spoken to you as I did just now than cut off my hand. I'm possessed of an evil spirit. I wonder how you can have patience with me,—no, I don't either, when I remember what you are. O Noll, it's the same old trouble again. Father got very much offended with me because I lent Harold some money, and then came hard words. It was my own money, and I had a right to do as I chose with it, and I told him so. He said that I and my money belonged to him, and that I had no right to use either against his wishes,—and, oh dear, we were both angry enough to be bitter! I wish I had died before ever

it happened! And he says that if I ever see Harold again I must leave Handon Place for ever."

Ned stopped, choked with emotion. He had loved his father tenderly, and been a most dutiful son until the tempting of sinful paths had led him away; and every stern word which the father had uttered cut deep into the son's heart.

"O Ned," Noll exclaimed, "how could you let it come to this?"

"I didn't let it come to this!" said Ned with sudden vehemence; "I tried hard to prevent it."

"What! when you went with Harold all the time?"

"I didn't give him all my time. I was at home a great deal; and of course I thought I could do as I liked with my spending-money."

"So it is your father who is to blame entirely?" said Noll.

"No," said Ned quickly, and with the truthfulness which was natural to him; "you mustn't blame father—not very much. I know I've

troubled him and been obstinate and wicked. I wish I hadn't it to think of,"—his tone growing remorseful. "But I've done a great many things of late that would have startled me once. Oh, I don't know what's going to become of me!"

"Still you're not ready to give up Harold and turn to better things," said Noll.

"Of course I don't want to turn him adrift, he's such a pleasant fellow," said Ned.

"Well," said Noll regretfully, "I don't see what you can do, then. You can't do right and wrong at the same time. And now it has come to that pass when you've got to give up Harold, or your father. O Ned, once you would not have hesitated a moment in your decision! How *can* you now?"

Ned made no reply; but his head upon Noll's shoulder trembled a little.

"Once," said Noll, "you would have been by him every day of his illness, for fear that he would be lonesome or need your care. Think how many days you've left him alone! And how can you tell what the end will be?"

Something like tears fell upon Noll's hands. There was a long, long silence. Then Ned lifted his head, picked up his cap, and appeared to be ready to go.

"What!" said Noll, "going back so soon?"

"Yes; while I've got a little resolution to do right. I mean to see father as soon as I can."

"Good!" said Noll, following him to the gate; "and turn clear about in your track, and take a good start; won't you, Ned? Oh, how I wish I could help you!"

Ned paused—his shapely figure and handsome head outlined by the moonlight.

"You've been a dear good friend to me, Noll," said he; "I don't know how you've kept from despising such a weak fellow as I am. But perhaps I'll not trouble you much longer. I don't know."

"Because you'll be strong enough to bear all your troubles yourself," said Noll cheerfully. "Oh, I hope that time will come soon! I think it will. I pray God to help you always."

Ned took Noll's hand and wrung it warmly.

"Good-bye," said he, as if he were taking a long leave of him.

"Good-night," said Noll cheerily.

Tarrying at the gate, one figure watched the other as long as the moonlight made it visible, uttering a fervent prayer that God would deal mercifully with the straying one.

The next day came the reopening of the university term. Noll went back to books and familiar faces with a thrill of pleasure and content. Going home to dinner at noon, he found a note lying by his plate.

"Dat yer man of Mass' Thorn's brung it," said Hagar, by way of explanation.

Noll opened the missive with a vague presentiment of trouble; but it contained nothing but an entreaty for him to come to Handon Place at once. With some regrets, he wrote a note to the professor, explaining his absence from the class; and after dinner he started at once for Handon Place. Never had the great mansion and its grounds looked fairer or statelier than on this sunny spring afternoon. The trim hedges were bursting into tender green; the sloping lawns were sprinkled here and there

with the gold of a dandelion; hyacinths smiled beside the winding box-edged paths, and there were sweet scents and odours from all sorts of bursting bloom and leaf. The deep silence alone struck upon Noll disagreeably. It must be that Ned was not at home, he thought. After waiting a minute on the marble steps, his ring was answered by Mr. Thorn's valet.

"Come in," he said at once; "we have need enough of you here. This way, if you please," leading Noll up the broad stairway. Noll had time to make but the vaguest of conjectures as to what could have happened, before he was ushered into Mr. Thorn's presence. The merchant sat in a great chair, bolstered with cushions and pillows, and looking so changed and haggard that Noll started with alarm. Turning his head a little, and seeing who had entered, the sick man exclaimed in a voice full of alarm and anxiety,—

"Noll Trafford! I'm glad to see you. *Have you seen Ned?*"

"Ned?"

The puzzled, astonished tone in which the

name came from Noll's lips, was a sufficient answer. The father turned away his head and groaned.

"Why, what has happened?" cried Noll; "isn't he here?"

But Mr. Thorn could not reply, and the valet made haste to explain.

"Ned has gone—run away," he said hurriedly; "we thought you might know something of him. This note was on the library table, and we thought him at your house until it was discovered."

Noll took the folded paper, too utterly astonished to read at first. Whatever he had surmised as the result of Ned's perverseness, the possibility of such a climax as this had never entered his mind. The note merely said,—

"DEAR FATHER,—I'm going away where I shall not trouble you any more. I started home from Noll's to-night, meaning to ask your forgiveness and have everything smooth again; but it was not to be so. Don't search for me, for I don't want to come back. NED."

"He met Harold Floyd on the road home!" Noll thought involuntarily. Then remembering into what hands Ned had fallen, to what evil influence and temptations he would be exposed, severed as he was from all the safeguards which home and friends could offer, a shiver of fear and trembling crept over him. Oh, what could be done?

The valet said, "I went to Floyd's aunt as soon as the note was found."

"Found him gone too?" said Noll, divining the truth.

"Yes; that is what makes the matter a great deal worse. We can't fear any evil too great for him to fall into!"

Mr. Thorn turned his face toward Noll, groaning heavily. The long weeks which he had been an invalid had robbed him of strength and firmness, and this new affliction found him weak and almost despairing.

"Oh, my son—my poor child," he groaned, "can nothing save you? Going straight down to ruin—gone already!—O Noll, what shall I do? How can I bring him back? I've been hard and bitter with him sometimes. I'd

give my right hand to recall the words. He's been foolish and wayward; but oh, I forgive him, I forget it all!"

"Try to compose yourself," said the valet anxiously; "this worrying makes you worse."

"How can I?" exclaimed the merchant; "how can I sit untroubled and see my boy—all that I care for in this world—going down to his awful ruin? Think of it, Bonnar!—my boy, noble and kind-hearted and gentle in spite of his waywardness, going down among the vile and degraded, to become one of them, to become hardened, and a thief, a robber, an outcast—thrown into a nameless grave at last! O God, how *can* I think of it?"

The quiet tears welled into Noll's eyes at this picture, and at the same time a determination, almost fierce in its intensity, filled his heart. He would go to the ends of the earth, in order that Ned should be found and wrested from ruin!

"Mr. Thorn," said he at once, "perhaps you will think it is useless, but I would like to go in search of Ned. I think I can find him."

For a minute a bright look came into the merchant's face.

"I would trust you as soon as any one," he said, "if you are willing to go. Ned loves you; he will be persuaded by you if by any one. But oh, I fear it will be useless. I have no hope that I shall ever see his face again!"

"But you *must* have hope!" said Bonnar, "else you will be too ill to see him when he comes."

Noll looked at the sick man's face, haggard and worn beyond expression, and felt a dread lest death should separate father and son before they could possibly meet again. The merchant, seeing that Noll was about to go, beckoned him to him.

"God bless you," said he; "and if you find Ned, tell him everything is forgiven and forgotten. Tell him to return and let us be happy what little time I have to live."

Noll took one more look at the haggard, anxious face, and turned to go. Bonnar followed him out.

“In which direction do you mean to start?” he asked.

“I haven’t decided yet,” said Noll; “I shall see Harold’s aunt first. When I’ve made out my plan I’ll drop you a note. I shall start to-night, if possible.”

CHAPTER XII.

A WEARY SEARCH.

NOLL went out of the great mansion just in time to meet Dr. Baill on the steps. They looked at each other in silence for a few seconds. Then the doctor said,—

“Well, this is a pretty business for Ned Thorn to be in. It will kill his father, most likely.”

“O doctor,” said Noll, “do you think that?”

“I’m afraid—afraid,” said the doctor, shaking his head. “Thorn was badly enough off before. They sent for you at once, I’ll warrant.”

“Yes,” said Noll, “and I’m going to start in search of him this very night, if I can get ready.”

The doctor gave a little whistle.

"I thought you were going back to your books to-day?" he said.

"I was," Noll replied, a faint shadow of regret stealing over his face, but fleeing away as he said, "But what are books and study compared with Ned? O doctor, they're just nothing at all."

The doctor smiled gravely. "I didn't expect any less of you," said he. "Take good care of yourself, and success go with you. You've got the son to attend to and I the father. God grant we may both succeed. Good-day to you."

Noll hurried down through the sunny lawns, unmindful of scent or blossom, and went at once to Harold's aunt in Shelly Street. She was a middle-aged little woman with a sharp tongue.

"Glad enough to get rid of the shiftless fellow," said she, "though he went off without paying his last quarter's board. Reckon it'll be money in my pocket in the end. Took one o' your friends with him, did he? Well, I can't say I'm very sorry. You rich folks are just as able to bear some o' the trouble as me.

Where's he gone to? I don't know no more'n you are likely to do. He came here from Cropton; likely enough he's gone back there."

And this was all the information Noll could obtain from her. Walking home he remembered that he had always heard Harold talking about Cropton—telling what a dull, sleepy, stupid old sea-town it was, and the good chances there were for shipping as cabin-boy on the merchantmen, or as hand on board the whalers. He did not believe Ned to have any inclination for the sea; but if he was under Harold's influence, there was no judging what he might do or whither he might go. Partly for this recollection, and partly because he knew not where else to look, Noll decided to go there. It was already getting late in the afternoon, and he had no time to spare. He stopped at the university to explain to the professor the reason for his absence, and to inform him that it was probable several days would elapse before he could take up his studies again. The professor's face showed his regret.

"Ah, you have no mercy for yourself," he said, shaking his head dubiously; "by-and-by you will kill yourself for your friends."

"There's not much danger," said Noll smiling. "I'm sorry to fall behind the class, but Ned's safety is more than books and study. If I can only bring him back, then I shall go to work with good courage."

"So—so," said the professor reflectively, and stood watching Noll's figure till it was out of sight, vaguely conscious that the world was not so utterly selfish as he supposed, and wondering whether there was not a little of the old heroic spirit left in it.

Hagar received Noll's intelligence with much astonishment, but at once set about making the necessary preparations for the journey. In the meantime Dr. Baill called to say that Mr. Thorn was rapidly growing worse, and expressed grave doubts as to the probability of Ned's ever seeing his father alive, though Noll should be so successful as to discover him at once. But Noll was full of hope and courage. He sent a note to Bonnar the valet, informing him in what direction he was going, and promising to

send a despatch as soon as he discovered any trace of the fugitive. Then, after a hasty lunch, he bade Hagar good-bye, and, with a prayer for success in his heart, set out upon his search.

The glory of declining day lay fair and sweet upon land and sea as the outward-bound train trundled slowly through the city suburbs into the country, growing dim and shadowy with coming night. Sunset fires upon the hills died away; village and river and pleasant countryside slept in the darkness. Ceaseless rumble of wheels, dim murmur of voices, the roar of echoing woods and bridged streams, all died at last upon Noll's ear, and he slept. The hurry and excitement of the afternoon had made him weary, and all through the long night he slumbered, with intervals in which he was dimly conscious of the tread and shuffle of feet, the banging of doors and cross tones of sleepy porters; then the train rushed on, and his sleep grew sound again. When at last he awoke—unable the first moment to recollect where he was—it was to find that the dawn of a lovely spring morning was struggling in upon the

sleepy, jaded faces of his fellow-travellers, and to remember that a little after sunrise he was to be in Cropton. His heart beat fast with anticipation. Oh, if only he might be successful!

Cropton was but a little sea-town, and he could give it a tolerably thorough search; but oh, what a multitude of chances there were that he should miss Ned after all! He knew that he needed other help than his own, and dropping his head on the seat before him, he prayed earnestly for it. God could guide his steps at once to Ned if he were there; he could lead Ned's footsteps so that they might meet. For this he prayed earnestly, and believing that his prayer would be heard, stepped out of the cars at his journey's end with a brave heart.

There was no crowd at the station. Everything and everybody seemed dull and quiet; or perhaps they were not yet up, he thought. Noting how few people there were to get off or on at the station, he wondered whether some one might not recollect seeing Ned and Harold. Though with only a remote hope of meeting

such good fortune at once, it would do no harm to ask, he thought; and going to the drowsy-eyed station-master he made inquiries.

"Well," said the man, after a minute's reflection, "I believe there were two youngsters about here yesterday forenoon. Town chaps, both on 'em, I judge. Left their carpet-bag here, I b'lieve."

For half a minute Noll could not speak. Then he said, with an eagerness which startled the station-master,—

"Is the bag here yet?"

"Wall, I don't know. I can tell by lookin'."

He unlocked the baggage-room and went in to look, Noll waiting with an impatience that was hard to contain. Pretty soon he heard him shout to a young man who was sweeping out the waiting-room,—

"Williams, what's took that 'ere bag them town chaps left here?"

"One of 'em came an' took it last night," said a voice from out a cloud of dust; "went off on the 11.20 train."

Noll's heart sank down — down. The

station-master came back and repeated this statement, adding,—

“Friends o’ yours, eh?”

“Yes,” said Noll, “and I’m anxious to find them.”

He went to the door of the room where the dust was pouring out, and managed to make himself visible to the energetic sweeper.

“Did only one go on the night train?” he asked.

“Well,” said Williams, “that was all that came for the bag, anyhow. Reckon that *was* all, for, come to think, there wa’n’t nobody got aboard that train but him.”

“How did he look?” queried Noll.

“A little shorter’n you, I guess; a slick, smilish sort of fellow. Give me a quarter when I handed him the bag.”

This was not Ned, Noll thought; it might be Harold. But could they have separated? And if the person described was Harold, what could have become of Ned?

Noll thanked his informants and walked away, feeling very much mystified. The sun was high enough to shine warm and bright in

the streets, but there was no more stir than before. Now and then he encountered a woollen-shirted, sailor-like figure, going down toward the sea with oars and a net; but bustle or activity there was none. All the men had gone to sea, and the women slept late, Noll thought.

The next place at which he made inquiries was an odd little inn, along the front of which was a row of great pink-lipped conch shells. But no strangers answering to Noll's description had been seen. A guest was evidently such a rare event at this quaint little place that Harold's or Ned's appearance would have been remembered. Here Noll ate his breakfast, and ascertaining that there were two or three other inns in different parts of the town, renewed his search.

They were all dull, quiet little places, and from the landlords came but one answer. They had had no guests of such description. When he turned away from the last public-house, tired with his unsuccessful tramp, it was high noon. But there was no time to spend in eating dinner, he thought;

he must go at once and search on the wharves. He wished, now that he was certain about the inns, that he had gone to the wharves first. There was no telling how many vessels with runaway boys on board had put to sea since morning.

The street leading to the sea was lined with queer, old-fashioned houses, with diminutive yards,—or with no yards at all,—their walks lined with bleached clam-shells or periwinkles, and with generally some strange curiosity, fished out of the sea, adorning the weather-beaten porches. Occasionally Noll came upon an old sea-captain sitting in the sun and smoking his pipe. The first vigorous sign of life which he encountered was on the wharves; and here, looking at the maze of weather-stained merchantmen, coasting vessels, snowy-sailed schooners, little smacks, and black, tall-masted whalers, his courage almost died within him. How was he ever to trace Ned in such a tangle? Once more he could only pray that God would direct his footsteps and his search successfully. He passed two or three groups of sailors, lounging and

whittling in the sun, and went along till he came to a broad-shouldered, blue-shirted fellow engaged in marking a box. Something in his frank, pleasant face impelled Noll to stop and make inquiries.

The man laid down his marking-brush, put his hands in his pockets, and took a survey of Noll from head to foot. Then he said,—

“Well, you couldn’t have hit better if you’d tried all day. I’m the man for you! The chaps were on my boat yesterday, certain sure.”

“And where are they now?” said Noll, almost breathless with eagerness.

“Well, that’s more’n I can tell you now. They came aboard yesterday afternoon, lookin’ for a chance to ship. One of ’em was fast for goin’, but the other hung back; and finally t’other give up, an’ they went off some’eres else.”

If ever a face expressed disappointment, Noll’s did at this moment.

“They’re certainly the ones I’m looking for,” he said regretfully; “and oh, I would give

almost anything to find them here. Do you remember how they looked?"

"Well, one was taller than the other. The shortest one was about the 'cutest little chap you ever see. You might throw him over that whaler's topmast out yon a hundred times a-runnin', an' he'd come down on his feet like a cat every time. Smooth as oil, too,—a *leetle* too smooth, I thought, and 'ud bear watchin', beggin' your pardon. T'other didn't say much—hung around kind o' still, an' didn't appear to know the ropes very well. Saw in a minute he'd never make a sailor, an' told him so. Good-lookin' chap, curly head, white hands,—regular gentleman all around. Now, hain't I told 'em like a book?"

In spite of his grievous disappointment Noll could not help laughing at the truthfulness of the captain's descriptions.

"And now can you give me any clew by which I can trace them further?" he anxiously asked.

"Well, looks rather dubious; but there's no tellin' where they may turn up. I'll go out and ask Stemmer an' his men."

The captain went out to one of the knots of sailors which Noll had passed, and came back, saying,—

“They hain’t seen nobody, sorry to say ; but I’ll tell you what you’d better do afore you go any further. There’s Mother Button—that’s her house you see up yon, with the whale’s jaw in the door-yard ; an’ if they were here over night, they mos’ likely put up at her house. She keeps lodgers. You jest go up an’ ask her ; an’ if she hain’t seen ’em, I’ll try to look further for you.”

Noll gratefully thanked the captain for his efforts, and turned back up the street to the house designated. The sight of the kind-eyed, motherly face that appeared in answer to his knock, made his not over-hopeful heart beat quicker. After a quick, curious look in his face, the good woman exclaimed,—

“Why ! I thought at first that you was somebody I’d seen afore come back. Walk right in and have a seat, please.”

“I can’t stay to sit down,” said Noll, “unless you can give me some information of a friend I’ve lost. A captain on the wharf

thought he might have lodged here last night."

"What kind of a friend?" said the little landlady, with a keen look in her eyes.

"About my own age," said Noll; "a little taller, with curly hair. His name—"

"Are you a true friend of his?" demanded Mother Button, getting up from her chair.

"I ought to be," said Noll; "I left home in search of him last night. His father is sick, —dying even, I'm afraid. If you know—"

"Give me your hand," interrupted the little woman, and at the same time extending her own; "I'm right glad to see ye. Your name is Trafford. I can tell you all about your friend. He left this house about ten o'clock this forenoon, in about as much trouble as I ever see a lad."

"Where has he gone?" said Noll, taking two or three steps toward the door.

"Wait—it ain't no use to hurry," said Mother Button, pointing to the chair he had left; "he's miles from here now."

"Did he go alone?" cried Noll.

"I hope so," said the good woman with a

vehement gesture; "but just sit quiet till I can tell you about it. The lads come here last evening after bed and supper. Now I take to boys, and can mostly tell about 'em, and thinks I when they was eatin' supper, 'Here's somethin' wrong. These birds ain't both of a feather.' So I kept my eyes on 'em pretty sharp, and it didn't take me long to tell which was which, and thinks I of the shortest one, 'You're up to some mischief or another, sir. Goin' to get your mate into some scrape, I'll be bound! I'll see what I can do for you, sir!' But, oh dear, he was worse than I thought. And what do you think?—when we come to get up this morning he'd gone; took every cent of the other's money, and gone high and dry!"

"Robbed Ned?" cried Noll.

"Yes, of everything 'cept his watch and a ring on his finger."

For a minute Noll was speechless; then with a glad ring in his voice he exclaimed,—

"I'm glad! I'm glad! Ned is cheaply rid of him.—Not glad for the theft, Mrs. Button," he explained, "but because he can no longer influence Ned."

"So I thought," said the good woman, "as soon as I could get my wits about me. But it took a while to do that, for I never had any thievin' in my house afore."

"And Ned—what did the dear fellow do?" said Noll eagerly.

Mother Button wiped her eyes.

"It's hard to tell about it. He was all in a maze, like,—he'd been so deceived, you know. At first he sat like a stone; then a sorry look began to creep into his face, till I couldn't bear to look at it, an' by-an'-by his head dropped down on the window-sill yonder, an' I jest went out o' the room an' left him there. I didn't go again till I'd got breakfast ready; and what does he say but, 'Thank you, Mis' Button; I guess I won't eat breakfast: I can't pay you for what I've had already.' 'You shall have forty breakfasts if you like, an' no pay!' says I, an' finally coaxed the poor fellow to eat a mouthful. I don't know what trouble the lad's been makin', but I'll say this for him, he's jest one o' the grandest-hearted true gentlemen as ever drew breath. An' when he went away nothin' would do but I must

take the ring on his finger for pay. It had a bit o' blue glass in it, an' as it wa'n't o' no particular value, I took it jest to pacify him."

Mother Button wiped her eyes at the recollection.

"May I see the ring?" said Noll, with a queer look on his face.

CHAPTER XIII.

N E D.

THE "bit o' blue glass" was a turquoise, and worth, probably, more money than Mother Button had ever had at once in her life. Nothing could have brought Ned more vividly before Noll than the sight of this ring. It was an old family heirloom, esteemed beyond price by Mr. Thorn, and valued almost as highly by Ned. Noll well remembered the day when the father judged his son old enough to wear it, and Ned, proud and happy, received it as his own. The tears started in his eyes, thinking what a struggle there must have been before the precious old relic was given up.

"Maybe," said Mother Button, who was watching his face intently, "you've seen the ring afore."



NED'S RING.

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"Hundreds of times!" said Noll; "it was never off Ned's finger. It has been in his family a great many years, and is worth—I dare not say how much."

The good woman's eyes showed her astonishment.

"You shall take it right back to him," said she. "I wouldn't keep it a minute if I'd know'd. 'Mis' Button,' says he, 'maybe it'll pay you a little for what you've done for me; an' I had to take it anyhow. But you shall carry it back.'"

Noll shook his head.

"Ned gave it to you," he said, "and I wouldn't like to take it away; unless, seeing what a precious old relic it is, you'd let me pay you part of its value at least."

Mother Button was firm in refusing to receive anything, and Noll quite as determined that she should. The matter ended at last by the good lady yielding, seeing that her visitor would receive the ring on no other condition.

"Now," said Noll, as he slipped the old relic upon his finger, "please tell me all you can about Ned's destination, for I must be on

my way again. Couldn't he be persuaded to go home?"

"No, not by anything I could say," said Mother Button sighing; "he was too proud, I s'pose. 'Go right back to that father and them friends o' yours,' says I, for he'd told me all about ye, 'fore you get into trouble any deeper.' Then his chin quivered a little, thinkin' on it, an' drawin' himself up, he says, proud enough, 'I've made them trouble enough already. I'll go off by myself, an' try to be a man now.'"

"But where did he go, and what did he have to go with?" said Noll anxiously.

"He was goin' to Graytown to look for work,—there's mills there, you know; an' his watch would pay for a good deal, he said. I tried to make him promise to go home; but he just bit his lips hard, an' said he must fight his own way now. Them's the last words he said when he went out."

Graytown was fifty miles further on,—a bustling factory town; but Noll felt his search almost ended now, he was so sure of soon seeing his friend.

"Well, Mrs. Button," he said with a glad voice, "I must start on after him to-night. To-morrow I think we shall both be on our way home; and, oh, I can't thank you enough for what you've done for him and me. When I came in, I was almost discouraged; now, I am almost certain of success."

"I'm thankful enough it's turned out so," said Mother Button joyfully. "I don't want no thanks nor nothin'; but if you could get a chance to send me a word some time, and let me know how you found him, and whether his father was alive when he got back, I should reckon on it mightily."

"I'll write as soon as we get home," said Noll.

Mother Button hesitated a minute, but replied,—

"I can't read writin',—more's the pity,—but I'll get Cap'n John, down here on the wharf, to read it for me. That'll do just as well! I shall be 'mazin'ly thankful to hear."

Noll took leave of her, she standing in the little weather-stained porch to watch him out

of sight, and turned his tired feet toward the railway station. He was too glad and grateful to think much of weariness. God had guided his steps all day long, he thought. Soon he should have the joy of looking in Ned's face. The wind from the sea blew up cold and damp, dimming the late afternoon sunshine with heavy clouds, and shortly after arriving at the station the rain began to patter down. Noll was no longer at any loss to know who the youth was that called for the travelling-bag and went away in the night. But though the bag doubtless contained clothing of Ned's, Harold was welcome to it, he felt.

When he came to buy his tickets, the station-master remembered him.

"Hain't had very good luck in your search, have ye?" said he. "T'other young chap come here about three hours after you went away, and went off on the up train. Didn't buy no ticket, so I can't tell you where he's gone; but seein' there'd been inquiries, I took particular notice which train he went on. Tried to ask him a few questions, but he was whist as a mouse."

Noll bought his ticket for Graytown, and at early nightfall was on his way again, joyful and expectant. The dull mist of rain and wind, the black night and dreariness without, were forgotten. Thoughts of Ned and the waiting ones at home kept his heart full enough. After about an hour's ride the train stopped at Riverford, a little manufacturing village. It was too dark to see anything but a blurred glimmer of lamps, and the train paused but a minute; but in that minute a wet, silent figure entered the car. Hearing the door shut, Noll looked up, his heart giving a quick, unaccountable leap at sight of the new passenger. He half sprung to his feet, then slowly settled back as the conviction came upon him that he had made a mistake. The car was full of comfortable drowsy people who had settled themselves for a long night's ride, and the newcomer had some difficulty in finding a seat. He came slowly down the car, Noll unable to keep his eyes away from him. Opposite his seat a ray from the lamp fell across the lower half of the figure's face, almost hidden by his wet slouched hat, and with a sudden, half-

smothered cry of "Ned!" Noll seized and drew him down beside him. *His friend was found!* A minute they looked at each other, eyes eloquently revealing what tongues had no power to say; then Noll exclaimed,—

"I thought you were in Graytown."

"I started for there, but there was a village on the way that I wanted to try, so I stopped. And you?"

Ned looked as if he doubted the evidence of his own senses as he asked this question.

"I started in search of you yesterday," said Noll, "as soon as we found you were gone. I thought you—O Ned!"

Again there was another eloquent silence, for the reason that both experienced a sudden sensation of choking in their throats. By-and-by Noll managed to say,—

"I believe God hindered you at that little village that we might meet. I'm so grateful" (tremulously)—"that—that—"

Another silence. Curious proceedings their fellow-travellers must have thought. But Ned suddenly drew back, as if impelled by a painful recollection.

"It's the happiest minute I ever lived—seeing you once more; but I'm sorry it's happened," he said. "I can't go back with you. It's no use to ask me. I'm never going back till I can carry as much as I took away. I've got to work to do that."

His face was proud and firm as he said this; but there was a wonderfully wistful look about his mouth.

"You are going back in the first homeward train which we can catch," said Noll, just as if he had not heard. "It must pass us at the next station, or at Graytown at least. We shall take it there, and be in Hastings to-morrow forenoon."

Ned shook a little, but said,—

"You will be there; I shall not."

"Do you think I have searched so long to lose you now?" said Noll. "If I cannot persuade you, I must give you a message that will. Your father said, 'Tell him to return, and let us be happy what little time I have to live.' Your going almost broke his heart. Doctor Baill was not certain that you would ever see him alive, even if I found you at once."

Will you deny him the last hope of ever seeing you again?"

Noll was solemnly in earnest. Ned trembled like a leaf.

"I—I have been robbed, stripped of everything," he said huskily, putting out his hands with an expressive gesture. "I—I'm ashamed to go home."

Noll grasped his hand, and slipped something upon one of the fingers. The bright colour leaped into Ned's cheeks and up to his forehead, the tears suddenly brimmed his eyes, and he exclaimed,—

"You've seen Mother Button?"

"Yes."

"And know about Harold, and—and—"

"Everything," said Noll. "Now, dear Ned, haven't you gone about far enough in this path of yours? At home there's a dying father longing for you. Will you give up now, or will you go on in your own way?"

Ned put up his hand in a quick, appealing way, then suddenly burst into tears.

Noll took off the old slouched hat, drew his friend's head down to his own shoulder, so as

to screen him somewhat from the observation of others, and did not try to check his tears. Thoughts of the father whose heart he had almost broken, recollections of the beautiful home he had deserted, of his once joyous and happy life, filled Ned's heart with unutterable anguish. His father?—perhaps he had no father now. His home?—he had deserted it to go with one who had deceived and plundered him. His life?—oh, what a marred and ruined life he had been trying to make it! Penitent thoughts which since his flight had been crushed resolutely down rose up unrestrainedly. He saw, as if it had all been pictured in one long panorama, his slow turning away from right paths, his stubborn refusal to be guided by friends' counsels, his vacillating when almost persuaded to turn from evil, his unkindness to the father who now was either dead or dying. Oh, but this way down which he, a transgressor, had walked, was a hard, hard way!

The train came to a stand-still at last. Noll hurried out, made a few inquiries, and came back to say,—

"The train which returns to Hastings stands on the other track. You will go, Ned?"

"Yes," said Ned.

They were soon in the other train, with their faces turned toward home; but not until Noll had sent a message flying ahead of them to announce their coming. The long night ride was a very silent one, considering how much the two had in their hearts. Harold's name did not pass between them; Noll uttered no reproaches; Ned asked few questions. Perhaps the solemnness of what the morrow held for them disinclined them to talk. Noll, tired and weary, slept a little when there was not too much noise; Ned did not shut his eyes at all. Slumber was far from him all the night. God, through a hard and bitter lesson, was teaching him.

Dr. Baill, to whom the despatch had been sent from Graytown, entered the depôt just as the train from the east rumbled in. His carriage was waiting without, for the travellers whose coming had been announced. But before

he had time to distinguish any particular face in the crowd that poured from the cars, he felt a touch upon his arm, and turning, met Ned Thorn's appealing eyes.

"How is my father, Dr. Baill?" he asked.

"Alive!" said the doctor heartily. "Glad to see you, my dear boy,"—as if nothing had happened. "Where is Noll?"

Noll came up to answer the question in person.

"God bless you!" said the doctor, his fine eyes growing moist: "no one but you could have accomplished this. Come; we won't stop here a minute."

Ned asked no more questions, but his pale, grave face betrayed his hidden anxiety. When they drove up into the beautiful grounds of Handon Place,—beautiful, though all adrip with rain,—his lips trembled. Dr. Baill made haste to put him out of suspense.

"Go right up to the chamber," said he; "be quiet, that is all. I will wait here in the hall."

Ned beckoned Noll to follow. But at the head of the stairs Noll paused, and allowed

his friend to go in alone. Such a long, long silence followed, unbroken save by a few faint sobs, that his heart began to beat a little faster with apprehension. But presently Ned came out, the tears still wet on his cheeks, and said,—

“Come in too, Noll; father wants you.”

Noll went in, following his friend up to the low draped bed where the merchant was lying.

“Here he is, father,” said Ned chokingly, “close beside you.”

Noll dropped down upon the purple rug, and feebly laying his hand on the boy’s head, the merchant said, in the solemn voice of one who lay almost within the shadow of death,—

“Dear child! God bless you for ever and ever, for what you have done for me and mine.”

That was all he could say. For Noll it was enough. His reward seemed great.

Dr. Baill came in pretty soon, and then Noll went back downstairs. The doctor, replying to the eager questioning of Ned’s eyes, said plainly,—

"I cannot give you any great hope. There is a small chance of recovery; but it can only result from the most assiduous care, the most tender and gentle nursing, and absolute freedom from all disturbance or trouble."

Ned uttered no promise nor said a word, but there was that in his face which made the doctor exclaim, as he met Noll at the foot of the stairs,—

"Our old Ned Thorn is gone for ever. You brought us back another person."

"Why, doctor, what do you mean?" said Noll.

"I mean that folly has gone out of him. Too soon to judge, perhaps you think, but time will show you. From this time henceforth he will be utterly changed. Watch and see."

Noll did watch and see, and grew happier every day. Mr. Thorn lay for weeks at the gate of death, unconscious some of the time; and if ever human love and patience were tested, Ned's were. Patiently he watched and cared; faithfully he performed the heavy duties that fell upon his shoulders; and no

one heard a word of discouragement or weariness escape him. As the doctor said, he was "utterly changed ;" and seeing all, Noll rejoiced at the wonderful things God was doing for his friend.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PROFESSOR'S TROUBLE.

IN those happy days Noll went back to his books, a little behind his class, it was true, but very hopeful and courageous, and bound to regain his old position. Those who knew the reason for his absence and consequent backwardness in study loved and respected him more than ever. Even Professor Bayler was dimly conscious that somebody right before his eyes was living nobly,—shirking no cross that lay in his path, hesitating not to sacrifice his own pleasure and interests for others' good, and making all with whom he came in contact glad that he had lived. Was this really the selfish, heartless, nineteenth century? the professor wondered; or were the old days of nobleness, when men could be heroic and give

up even life for their principles, coming back ? The question was often in his mind, but he never could answer it quite to his satisfaction.

The sweet and fragrant spring slowly passed into summer. Noll steadily gained upon those who were above him in his class, and hoped by autumn to be in his old place. But on one of those summer mornings, the class assembled for recitations and found no professor present ! This was rather mysterious, as the wise German was particularly punctual, and required his pupils to be so. After nearly half an hour of waiting, Professor Raynor, of another department, came in to say that Professor Bayler was so prostrated by the intelligence of a sudden death in his family at home as to be unable to appear ; there would be no recitations that day.

After a few comments and expressions of sympathy the class dispersed, most of them not averse to a holiday. But Noll remained in the deserted recitation-room, wishing that he had had an opportunity to ask Professor Raynor a few questions. He alone, of all the class, knew about Carl Bayler. Could it be

possible that Carl was dead? He trembled at the possibility. What would become of the stricken father? But not long had he to remain in doubt, for presently Kepler came limping in, his face eager with the news he brought.

"Oh, here you are! I've been looking high and low for you to tell you the news. What do you think? All this time the professor has had a son at home in Germany, that nobody knew anything about; it's him that's dead."

Noll sat motionless, his heart full of pain. Carl had become a familiar friend to him through his father's letters.

"Why," said Kepler, "aren't you astonished? You don't say a word."

"I knew of his son before," said Noll.

"You did? and never said a word! Well, he's dead now, and the professor has gone wild, they say; no one can do anything with him. He's shut himself up, refuses to see any one, pounds his head against the wall, and acts like a distracted man. The President and Professor Raynor went down, but he wouldn't

see them. They've sent for a doctor now."

"I wonder if it is Dr. Baill?" said Noll.

"Likely enough; he's acquainted with the professor."

Noll started up. "I wonder if the poor father would let *me* in?" he said, catching at a faint hope. "Perhaps he would, for I knew Carl; the others did not."

"Well, and if he would?" said Kepler with wide open eyes.

"Maybe I could comfort him a little. It's dreadful to be in a strange land, and unable to find a spark of comfort anywhere."

"You could do it if anybody," said Kepler. "I'd try, if I were you. Come; I'll go down there with you."

"If I can see Dr. Baill, he will tell me what is best," said Noll as they went out.

There was no one at the door of the professor's room. Within all was silent as death, and nothing indicated any such distraction as Kepler had told of; and while they waited here, the doctor—and Dr. Baill it proved to be—came along the hall.

"Well, Noll," said he gravely, "our friend the professor is in trouble, it seems. Will he let no one in?"

The doctor rapped softly as he spoke. The silence remained unbroken.

"Professor," said the physician through the key-hole, "I am your friend Dr. Baill. Will you not let me in?"

Nothing broke the intense silence. The doctor repeated his question, but with no better success.

"Well," said he, "I don't see how I'm to get in unless the door is opened." He reflected a minute, and suddenly bethinking himself of a promising plan, stooped again to the key-hole, and said,—

"Professor, here is your friend Noll Trafford. Will you not let him in?"

A moment of silence, then something like a faint groan fell upon their ears; the doctor had touched the right spring. A footstep sounded within, paused a moment at the door, then a voice, so changed as to be almost unrecognizable, said,—

"Are you there, Car—Noll?"

"Yes," said Noll, the tears starting to his eyes at the professor's mistake. "Will you let me in?"

The bolt slid back, the door slowly opened, and Noll entered. The doctor slipped in too.

In all his life Noll had never seen such an unutterably despairing face as the professor's. Uncle Richard's most sorrowful moments had never equalled it. One night had drawn ineffaceable lines of agony upon his face; one night had changed its mild, good-natured expression, to a haggard broken-heartedness that was fearful to look upon. The doctor tarried but a minute.

"Medicine wouldn't do him any good," he said aside to Noll. "Stay with him awhile, unless you dislike to, and I will come again before long."

To this Noll assented, and the doctor went his way.

The professor, after one long look at his pupil, threw himself down upon the lounge with a groan that expressed unutterable things. The man's heart was almost broken. Dead, buried for ever from his sight, was the one

object for which he had exiled himself from home, toiled night and day, denied himself society of friends, and made his life almost a burden. Toil of years, denial and weariness, exile among strangers,—all gone for naught! There was no need to live longer, for there was nothing to live for, he thought. Every hope and aspiration was crushed by the earth which covered cold, dead Carl. The warm, bright picture of a happy old age, with which he had tried to satisfy the yearnings of his poor, homesick heart—nothing but desolation now! Everything that could make his life worth living had turned to cold, dead ashes; his heart held nothing else.

It was a long time before Noll ventured to speak. The sight of such intense agony awed him; and when he spoke, it was with a voice that trembled a good deal.

"Dear professor," he said, "I don't want to trouble you. I'll go away at once if you wish; but if you will let me, I would like to stay. Carl was my friend too, you know."

The professor cried out at the name.

"Yes; he loved you too,—O my child!

You knew what a brave lad—so much braver than his father—I had! I have no lad any more—I have nothing. I will die.”

Noll shivered at the tone in which these words were spoken. How could he comfort this crushed heart that never knew God—that denied his existence?

“You are like him,” said the professor, looking up suddenly, with his wild, tearless eyes, that made Noll tremble; “you do not trouble me. I will look at you and think I see Carl. O my child! my child! Something has robbed me—I have nothing any more. My heart is torn where Carl was rent out of it! I will die—I will die.”

He buried his face in the pillow and groaned as only a strong man suffering such agony can groan. Noll could not endure this long. He ventured to approach the lounge and lay his hand gently on one of the professor's, feeling that he could better express his sympathy in this way than by words. The impulsive German closed his own over it so convulsively that Noll barely repressed a cry of pain.

“It is a warm, soft hand,” said the poor pro-

fessor; "once I had two such little hands. They hugged my neck when I said good-bye and came away to get money for them. Now I have gold and can go home pretty soon—but *I have no little hands!* They will freeze me if I go."

The professor's breast heaved, he shook from head to foot with the intensity of his emotion, and, for the first time since his bereavement, burst into tears. Noll drew a freer breath, though his own tears came too. Back to the father trooped vivid recollections of his boy's childhood, little events which had got dim in his memory, but which now shown out bright and real, and he wept uncontrollably. A little pair of shoes used to patter in the old house and quaint Dutch garden all day long, he remembered; a sunny-headed child made every hour of his life happy with its smiles and prattle; and though, in the years which had flown away since then, the little shoes had been laid aside and the child had grown almost to man's stature, for the poor professor all was unchanged. Now, though he lived ages, never again would the little shoes patter nor the

merry lips prattle: they had passed for ever out of his life.

"I hate Death!" he cried fiercely; "it has not so much pity as a robber. A robber would have spared me Carl—all that I had. Death would spare me nothing—not even my child. It has no mercy—it cares not where it stabs. I *hate* it!"

Noll directed the poor professor from this fierce outburst by a remark about Carl's dutifulness. The father's tears flowed again.

"He was good—always. If he had smoked or fought, like the others, Death would not have slain him. It takes the best. O Carl! O Carl!"

Now Noll knew that the son, growing up away from the father's influence, had rejected his scepticism; he well remembered the night on which the letter came that announced Carl's baptism into the Lutheran Church,—the same quiet old church where his dimly-remembered mother had worshipped before him. The professor stormed a little at first, but after all wrote back no reproaches, and loved his child none the less. Now, as he moaned un-

ceasingly, "I will die, I will die," Noll said softly,—

"Don't say that any more, dear professor. Carl would not like to hear you if he were here. He would tell you to live so that by-and-by you will see him again. Oh, dear professor, how *can* you give him up for ever—never to see him again?"

Noll regretted the words almost as soon as they were spoken.

"*Never see him again!*" The professor sprang up from the lounge, fairly shouting out the words. "Do you tell me that?" he almost shrieked; "that I shall see him no more!—that he is dead—like a stone, an insect? Never! never!—I will not listen. You tell me I will never have any more glimpse of him?"

This was the natural cry of the man's heart—its spontaneous rebelling against the cruel, unrelenting theory which had been forced upon it. For one moment it asserted its instincts; then, suddenly remembering that, according to his own philosophy, his boy was nothing but a bit of senseless clay, soon to become an un-

recognizable atom of Nature's great whole, the professor shuddered, buried his face in his hands and sat down, groaning heavily. This man all his life long had been building up his theory. It was to be the great work of his life. He had quarried for it in every language, he had studied unweariedly to strengthen it; again and again had he gone over the whole, that there might be no weak spot in the structure; but lo! in one night, and without a moment's warning, it had fallen all about him, and he lay wounded in the ruins. God had smitten his stubborn heart through his child.

Noll looked at the professor's intense agony, and wished that Dr. Baill would return. He trembled lest in his despair the father should attempt to destroy himself. It seemed as if the man's heart would be rent with conflicting emotions. He had got to give up the cherished theory of his life, or the hope of his child's immortality. Both he could not abide by. His *philosophy* regarded the lad as gone for ever out of all existence; his ashes were ashes, nothing more; no breath of life would ever re-animate them. His *heart* rebelled fiercely

against this. It had been easy to cherish his theory when applied only to those around him; now that it had come home to himself,—oh, it was terrible, terrible! He wanted to trample the hateful thing under his feet.

“O my child!” he burst out, “you were more than a tree or a beast; you cannot die as they die. I will *not* believe it! Never! *never*! Carl is somewhere—I know not where—but he is not dead like a stone! I will NEVER believe that!”

“O professor,” said Noll joyfully, “now you are believing the truth. Carl is in heaven; perhaps he can see us now. And since he is safe and happy, *do*—oh, dear professor, *do* give up your terrible belief and find Jesus Christ.”

The professor shook his head wearily.

“I do not know—I cannot think—it is so sudden! I know nothing now. O my work! —O my child!”

Noll was glad to see the doctor make his appearance.

“Well, my dear friend,” said Dr. Baill, sitting down by the lounge, “I hope I find you comforted.”

"I find no comfort anywhere," said the poor professor; "I am sure of nothing, except that Carl is not dead like a stone. I will *never* believe that!"

"To be sure not," said the doctor, in his kindly, sympathetic manner. "I lost a dear boy once myself. God knows I should be sorry-hearted enough if I did not think him treasured up for me. Cannot you find such comfort for yourself?"

"I do not know—I cannot tell. I must have time to think," said the professor, turning his face from them.

"Well," said the doctor, "Noll and I will go away for a while and leave you in quiet. One of us will come back before long if you wish."

"It is pleasant to have Noll here," said the professor tremulously.

"Then I will come back pretty soon," said Noll.

"Only the Great Physician can heal him," said Dr. Baill as they went out; "I pray that he may find Him."

CHAPTER XV.

CHANGED LIVES.

It was an hour or two past noon when Noll went out from the professor's sorrowful presence into the cheerful brightness and sunshine of the summer day. Dr. Baill went away at once to look after some of his patients, and Noll turned his feet toward Handon Place. His heart was full thinking of the stricken father's anguish, and as he went down the shine-and-shadow-flecked street, he wondered if the poor professor would not find God through his great trouble. He prayed earnestly that it might be so. It seemed as if his unceasing entreaties in behalf of one dear friend were about to be granted—Ned was so changed; if now the bereaved professor might find the Master, from whom he had strayed so far away, and be

comforted by him, giving his great knowledge and wisdom to his service,—oh, how unutterably joyful he should be !

Going in at the hedge-gate and up the quiet walks at Handon Place, he came suddenly upon Ned sitting on the grass in the shadow of a great stone vase, so overgrown with rank, broad-leaved vines that no sunlight pierced through. Ned's eyes had flashed a welcome before he said,—

“Wonderfully glad to see you ! Sit down here in the shade. I've been pushing father's chair up and down the walks until I'm warm.”

Noll threw himself down on the soft, cool grass, saying,—

“How is he to-day ? It's two or three days since I've seen you.”

“Father is better.” Ned's eyes changed wonderfully as he spoke, the warm colour stole up into his cheeks, his handsome face was all aglow with tender and grateful emotion. “Dr. Baill was here this morning, and said that if no trouble or anxiety came to make him worse, father would some time be able to go about

once more, and even attend to his business. And I am happy."

There could be no doubt of that, Noll thought as he looked. Now Ned was himself once more—only sobered, and with all the old traits of character that were worth keeping. And was there not something else? Noll was sure that such patience and self-denial, such utter forgetfulness of self as Ned had displayed for so many long weeks, could never have been born in his old careless, good-humoured, but selfish heart. But since Ned said nothing upon the subject which he most longed to speak of, he resolved to wait in patience a little longer, and lay regarding his friend with dreamy, pleasurable eyes, that hinted of the happiness in his own heart.

"Why!" said Ned, suddenly bethinking himself, "you are not at your books to-day. What is the reason?"

"Professor Bayler is in trouble—great trouble," said Noll, "and can hear no recitations. I've been with him most of the forenoon; but he seemed to want to be alone a little while, so I came down here to give him

an opportunity, and to see you. I'm glad not to hear his groans for a little while. Carl, his only child, is dead."

Ned was interested at once; so, as they sat there in the quiet, Noll told the story of Carl Bayler, of the professor's long years of toil, of his yearning for home and his child, of his own acquaintance with the youth across the sea, and gave some account of the father's intense grief and despair. The city bells chimed four before he was through.

"And you are staying with him?" said Ned. "I wonder if there is ever a trouble which you do not try to help some one bear?"

"I never saw such terrible trouble as the professor's before," said Noll; "he never can bear it alone. I hope it will be the means of his finding a Friend he has never known yet. But I'm afraid he has believed such false things so long that he may go back to them bitterer than ever."

"What! are you going now?" said Ned, as Noll picked up his hat and jumped off the grass.

"Yes; I promised not to stay away long.

It's after four already. I'm afraid that if he's left too long alone, his old bitterness and despair will return. Oh, if I can influence him a little, even a little, I shall be so glad!"

"I'll go down to the gate with you," said Ned, after a little pause.

Summer seemed to fill all the world. Breath of roses floated from the lawn across their path as, side by side, they followed its winding through rhododendrons, honeysuckles, and white-laden, heavy-scented syringas. Deep quiet reigned over all the grounds, save where the bees droned among the lilies, and a bird, hidden in the fastnesses of a high-climbing wistaria, sang as enchantingly as if the sweet, dumb day had found voice.

"I did not know what a beautiful afternoon it was before," said Ned as they came to the little wicket in the hedge. "Don't hurry, Noll." He put one arm over Noll's shoulder as he spoke, and with the other barred the gate. "I want to tell you something," he said. "What would be the happiest news I could give you?"

Noll suddenly divining what was coming, turned his face toward the long, sun-lighted street, and found that, owing to some strange affection of his eyes, everything there was strangely blurred and all a-tremble. It seemed as if Ned had interpreted his very thoughts.

"Perhaps," said Ned, tightening his arm about his friend, "you'll remember another afternoon, sunshiny like this, when we both stood at your gate. You had just decided to do your duty, stick to old Hagar, and give up making a home with with me. That was the first time in my life that I felt as if I wanted to be a Christian; and, if you remember, you told me that you should pray for me until I was one. I never forgot it. The thought stuck to me always, even when I was wild and making you all trouble. It struck me the moment I saw your face, when you found me in the cars. And now I want to tell you that I am trying to be a Christian; that I shall try, with Jesus' help, *always*. I didn't feel much like talking about it when I first began; I knew that I couldn't promise

anything ; that I had been everything bad and nothing good ; but it seems as if He gave me patience and courage all the while father was so low, and I never can be grateful and thankful enough that He spared his life, and gave me a chance to show how sorry I was for what I had done, and what a son I meant to be to him. And now, O Noll, I am happy once more."

Somebody else was happy,—so happy that the long blocks of houses, the street, the little wicket, and a dear, handsome head close by his own, glimmered but dimly through tears. It was such a joyful thought that he, Noll Trafford, had done a little—even a little—toward turning Ned to the happiness he had found. The summer afternoon held a new joy for him. Drone of bees, song of bird, bloom and fragrance, and sunshine of the fair, sweet hour, touched him with a new delight. He was of use in the world ; somebody was glad he had lived, and all his striving had not been in vain.

" Well," said Ned, releasing him, " I suppose I must let you go now. You have not said a

word, but I know what you feel, I think. *Such* a friend as you've been to me, God only knows. Why, I— But how can I try to tell it in poor, common words? I'll not undertake it."

He gave Noll's hand a warm press, and they turned apart; the little wicket opened and shut, and Noll was hurrying away. Probably, if he had followed his inclination at that moment, he would have skipped along his way as joyfully as any of the little boys who were racing down the street from school; but being conscious that he was somewhat larger than they, and supposed to be able to control his emotions, he walked back to the university buildings as gravely as anybody.

Noll found the professor more calm, but disinclined to talk. His first agonized, despairing outburst of grief seemed to have passed, and he sat silent and tearful. Perhaps, Noll imagined, he found some comfort in thinking that Carl had not passed for ever out of existence; but he did not, could not, know what a struggle was going on in the father's heart. Neither, when he bade the professor good-

night, promising to return in the morning, did he suspect one half the fierceness of the strife which filled his breast; which seemed as if it would rend his heart with its intensity; which made the sleepless night one long, bitter struggle,—the father's heart yearning for the God his child had trusted in, but his philosophy, his life-long belief, battling stubbornly against every repentant impulse. On his homeward way, Noll stopped at Father Prescott's to tell the story of the professor's trouble, and to beg that he would go and try to comfort the smitten father, and lead his clouded heart, if possible, into the everlasting light and peace of Christ. To this the good old man gladly assented, and Noll went home with still brighter spirits.

When, at last, Professor Bayler gave up, cast aside his sceptical philosophy as faulty and insufficient, put it for ever out of his heart as too terrible to be believed, he was like some poor, shipwrecked sailor, whom winds and waves have thrown upon the sand, bruised, drenched, and wounded, compass gone, no hope in sight, and with hardly life enough in his

breast to care to live. When, lying thus forlornly—weak, tearful, comfortless—such a sweet friend and comforter as Jesus Christ came to him, how could this poor, bruised soul do other than cling fast to him as it did? There was no other way, it seemed. Behind him lay the dark, terrible depths of his philosophy, out of which he had struggled; before him was Jesus Christ; and the poor father's heart, with all its sorrow and yearning, laid itself at his feet. With the professor there was no hesitating, no doubting, no clinging to other hopes; he clung desperately to Christ alone. Other men might build upon such frail hopes as their own merit or deserts; for him there was nothing but Christ. He himself had nothing to offer,—no honour to bring; nothing but a poor, beggared heart could he lay at his feet. But, poor though it was, the Lord accepted and made it his dwelling-place.

This change in Professor Bayler astonished all his friends. Even Noll was surprised to see with what childlike trust he threw himself upon the Lord's mercy. He trusted in him with his whole heart; his life had a new pur-

pose, and he went straightway to work. All his life long he had laboured to prove there was no God ; now his first efforts were directed to undo, as much as he might, the harm he had wrought. His precious manuscripts, upon which he had toiled all the years of his exile,—this work, which held place in his heart second only to Carl, was thrust into the fire ! The professor watched the work of his life crisp to sombre ashes, then turning to Noll, who had not watched the burning unmoved, he said,—

“ It is not so hard as you think. I am glad—I rejoice to destroy it so easily. *If it had been printed*—if it had passed out of my hands—” The professor paused and shivered ; then, as the gray ashes fluttered over the broad hearth and up the chimney, he exclaimed, “ See, it is gone ! It shall hurt no one. And I am glad—glad ! ”

Letters to life-long friends and brother professors of his favourite science, all contained intelligence of this new joy which had entered into his life. Men who, like himself, had striven against God, and perverted their great

knowledge in an evil cause, were perplexed and dismayed.

Professor Bayler had renounced the theories of his life! What could it mean? And he had accepted the Bible, against which he had waged war all his life-time; and even clung, with a faith that was marvellous, to the simple, old-fashioned story of Christ and the cross! What had produced the change? It was as if the strongest pillar in the structure they had reared had fallen to the ground and broken in twain. They could not replace it.

The professor went back to his class and schoolroom duties worn and thin, and with deep marks of suffering upon his face. The class received him with expressions of sympathy and affection; and work, hard and steady, once more went on. It did not need the reports which had been flying about the university, nor the solemn renunciation of his former infidelity which the professor made to his pupils, to enable them to perceive the change in him. There was no longer studied abstinence from mentioning the name of God in connection with his works. It was plain to

all that, in the fierce pain and sorrow which had been upon him, the professor had been born anew. Peace and patience possessed him. He was a little more quiet than before. He had a strong affection for every lad who entered and began his struggling way up the class. Perhaps that was owing to Carl's death. Noll came the nearest to him of all his acquaintances, and was called by the dead lad's name quite as often as by his own,—the poor professor's tongue refusing to make the proper distinguishment at times. Once, when this transfer of names had occurred during recitations, Atkins said, as they were going out,—

“This must be a funny world for you, Trafford. I wonder how I should feel to be called by a dead fellow's name half the time, besides taking his place in his father's heart?”

“I don't take his place,” said Noll; “for no one could ever do that.”

“Yes, you do—in a measure. You're the strangest fellow I ever saw—about most things. You stayed with the professor when not another of the class could have done it. You stuck to him through thick and thin; and

now that he is so completely changed, I suppose you feel paid for it all. Bah! it would be poor enough pay for me, I guess."

"I don't know about that," said Noll; "I think everybody feels paid when they have done a kind thing."

"I'll tell you what *I* know," said Atkins: "when the time comes for each of us to get his reward—happiness for some and sorrow for others, I suppose—somebody about your size is coming in for a tremendously large portion of the first-named. And if the rest of us get nothing but bitterness, we shall all be glad for you, and know that you didn't get any more than you deserved."

This from Atkins! Noll turned to the speaker with something like wonder in his eyes.

"I hope you'll try to win something more than bitterness for a reward," he said earnestly.

Atkins smiled in his cool, good-humoured way.

"Perhaps I may. To tell you the truth, I believe I should like to be rewarded in a

different manner. You may thank yourself for that. There doesn't seem much prospect of any such thing now, though. But I like your kind of preaching; and if you keep at it long enough, perhaps you'll fetch me. There—I must go the other way. Good-morning.”

With this he was gone. Noll thought he should never be surprised or discouraged at anything after this.

CHAPTER XVI.

“MY CUP RUNNETH OVER.”

SUMMER ripened, and shone in splendour for a while; then the mellow, peaceful autumn came in, bringing vacation to the university students and a round of glorious days in which to enjoy it. In those golden days, all of them perfect in their way, Noll was supremely happy. It seemed to him as if nothing could be added to make the bright, swift-flying weeks more joyful. Ned Thorn was proving, day after day, the depth and sincerity of his new motives; and the professor had found peace and trust such as no philosophy ever yielded. Never had the circle of his friends been wider, nor their attachment more plainly manifested. He was “Noll” to everybody. Without a relative in the world, he seemed to have closer and

dearer friends than any one else. Wherever he went among his acquaintances there was a welcome, hearty and fervent, for him. At the university, among all the host of ambitious, striving students, there were none who bore him anything but the heartiest good-will. It had taken a long time to bring about such a state of feeling; but Noll's conduct, through term after term, had won nothing but friendliness and esteem. If he gained honours over those who were older and farther advanced in study, envy and malice did not follow, as too often happens; but the defeated ones said, "Well, if we're to be beaten by any one, we'd rather it should be by Trafford. He deserves the honour as much as anybody."

So, looking back over the time which had flown since his uncle's death, Noll's aim to live for others' good and happiness seemed to have been most persistently followed. Through all the chain of joy and sorrow which time had woven since then, this living for others shone like a bright thread. His own life had been made glorious by it; how much it had warmed and brightened and made joyful the lives of

others, only one Eye—able to discern the boundless, never-ceasing influence of a kind deed—could perceive. The promise made with tears over Uncle Richard's grave had never been dimmed for a moment in his heart. Passing weeks only made it brighter, gave it strength, and made it more and more the fixed, unalterable purpose of his soul.

In the midst of his studies and the work he found to do, his heart went often over the sea to the sandy grave on the cliff. Culm Rock and its people were by no means crowded out of his thoughts by the new duties which his Hastings life had brought him. The little school, the patched dwellings, the rough old fishermen, still held their own place in his heart. It was one of his greatest pleasures to make up and order the list of stores which it had been Uncle Richard's custom to distribute at regular intervals among the Culm folk; and patient Henry Fields found himself and his school remembered as generously as before Richard Trafford's death. Mr. Gray sometimes murmured a little at this great outlay upon what he termed "a miserable little fish settle-

ment;" but when Noll proposed to reduce his own expenses rather than cut short any of the necessities he was in the habit of sending to Culm, the lawyer objected, saying he supposed the estate was well enough able to pay if Noll chose to throw away so much money.

"Now, Mr. Gray," said Noll, in reply to this, "do you really think it is throwing away money?"

"Well," said the lawyer, "we naturally conclude that money is spent uselessly, unless we can perceive some return for it."

"But there *is* a return for it," said Noll eagerly; "you've never seen Culm Rock, Mr. Gray. You don't know what a change there has been there since I first saw it. The houses were broken, dirty; there was no school; there was nothing pleasant or comfortable. Now there is—but wait; I've something that will give you a good idea of the change there's been." Out came one of Henry Fields' last letters which Noll proceeded to read,—the lawyer's rather stern features relaxing into pleasant, almost smiling, lines, as he looked at the bright, enthusiastic face before him and

listened. Such a face as this was worth the looking at, he thought, after a long day of vexation and bickering in court. "Now, Mr. Gray," said Noll, with something like triumph in his tone as he folded up his letter, "does that read as if the money made no return?"

Mr. Gray smiled.

"Of course I shall lose the case," he said; "there's no use in arguing with a person of your enthusiasm. You'd upset all my facts with one of your benevolent whims. Now you're getting to be quite a tall youth; by-and-by, but for these great outlays, you would come into possession of a handsome estate—really *very* handsome, I may say. But this constant drain upon the income—well, it cannot but show very perceptibly. I don't see why you should consider yourself bound to carry out such plans, even though your late uncle began them."

But Noll's eyes were clearer than the lawyer's, and the reason for keeping up the Culm School and supporting its teacher was not at all obscure. So the work went on; and Mr. Gray, though opposing the matter a little for

the sake of form and his own dignity, secretly was not very much averse to it. If this boy was so old-fashioned and quaint as to want to make the world better and happier, he was not going to hinder him. There were precious few who liked the work, he said to himself.

During the sunny days of this vacation, the professor, Noll, and some of the students whose homes were in Hastings, made excursions into the country and along the coast, in search of specimens for the university cabinet, and to improve their knowledge of the science they were studying. Those days were bright, and to Noll seemingly perfect. The early start in the morning, sometimes by boat but oftener afoot, with their stores in their hands and knapsacks on their backs in true German student fashion; the quick, steady tramp; the long, delightful, exciting day; the slower-paced homeward walk in the cool and dusk of evening, with full knapsacks and empty stomachs,—were delights of which Noll never tired. This pleasant out-door life broadened his shoulders, brightened his eyes, browned his cheeks, and

gave him a step which Dr. Baill very much approved of.

"Who would think," said the doctor, as they met one evening just as the stars were coming out, "that this sturdy figure, whose shoulders are almost up to mine, could be the same pale-cheeked, heavy-eyed Noll Trafford, who came up from Culm Rock with me one time? I shall set every young gentleman patient to studying geology after this,—if he has brains enough."

Returning one evening from a long exploring tour, he bade the professor good-night at the university gate, and instead of going homeward, took his way toward Handon Place. Some of Hagar's kin were ill, and she had gone to render them assistance; so he was to spend the night at Ned's. Above his head, in the yet tinted sky, the silver of the stars twinkled; upon the far sea-line, where the sun had set, lay the gorgeous glory of the clouds bathed in wonderful colour. The sea, dim and blue and dreamy, had hardly breeze enough for the ships; and in the street where he was walking the warm air could barely rustle the mellow-hued elm-leaves. A glorious day it had been, Noll

thought; but its fading into night was even more lovely. His heart was strong and happy within him, in spite of his tired feet; and his eyes had not seen so many dull bits of stone but that the glorified land and sea could catch and hold them. Smoky-hued spire and tower of the city stood up transformed in the warm, pink light; afar and low down the great golden star of a light-house lamp burned; and from the deep purple shadow of twilight, fallen over the lower part of the city, a bell chimed slow and faintly.

“What a beautiful world!” thought Noll, looking so intently that he nearly ran against an elderly figure by the little wicket at Handon Place.

“Your eyes were not with your feet, my son,” said Father Prescott’s pleasant voice. “I am glad to see you. Are you going to see Ned?” taking Noll’s outstretched hand.

“Yes; I have no housekeeper to-day, so I’m compelled to seek his hospitality.—O Father Prescott, did you ever see a more lovely evening? I didn’t know I was at Handon Place, the way seemed so short.”

The old pastor laid his hand affectionately on the youth's shoulder, a joyful light beaming in every curve of his time-worn face.

"You're very happy," he said; "I can see that in your eyes. But I'm sure that it is possible for you to be a great deal happier still; and that you will be when you've heard the same words I have just been hearing."

The old man folded his hands and looked afar at the sea with a face shining with happiness.

"It is something about Ned!" exclaimed Noll eagerly.

"Yes," said Father Prescott; "and I know of no words that could make this old heart, soon to be stilled, happier. But it is getting late, and I will leave you the pleasure of hearing this from Ned's own lips. - Good-night, my son."

He laid his hand on Noll's head and departed.

With thoughts all turned into a new channel, Noll hurried up the darkening lawn. The lights were twinkling out from the win-

dows of the great mansion. He entered the hall just in time to intercept Ned, who was crossing it.

"Noll Trafford!" exclaimed Ned, "and just home from a tramp. I never was more glad to see you. Going to stay all night? Good! We were just going down to supper; unstrap your knapsack, and make ready to go too."

He took Noll's cap as he spoke, and after that the heavy knapsack, his face showing how welcome his friend's presence was. Noll put off his eager questions till after supper; and after a dash of cold water upon his face and a few minutes' use of brush and comb, followed Ned down to the supper-room, where Mr. Thorn was already waiting. The merchant had recovered much of his former strength; the haggard, anxious expression of countenance was gone, and in its place were peace and cheerfulness.

This could not well be otherwise, Noll thought, seeing how every little want was anticipated by Ned, and how quickly and kindly every wish of the invalid was gratified. When the meal was over, and Mr. Thorn was

comfortably settled in his easy-chair for the evening, Noll thought of Father Prescott's words again. Ned came from his father's chair out to the great west window of the library where he was sitting, and sat down, saying, as he turned his face toward the still faintly-tinted sky without,—

"What a long, glorious day it has been! I suppose you've had a grand excursion. How far did you go?"

"To Creggie's Mills," said Noll; "there's a curious ledge there where the river cuts through. Oh, but indeed it's been a happy day! We brought home several fine specimens; and then the walk in this twilight was delightful. I was looking so hard at the sea, that I came near running into Father Prescott down by the gate."

There was a little pause—Noll waiting for revelations—Ned, perhaps, considering how he should best say what he wished to.

"Noll," said he at last, a new look in his handsome face, as he turned around to the light and his friend's questioning eyes, "I want to tell you of a decision I've been making

to-day, unless Father Prescott has told you already."

"No; he only said that he had heard something which made him very happy, and that he would leave me the pleasure of hearing the same from your own lips. It was something very pleasant, I know, by the way his eyes looked. And now, Ned, tell it to me."

A minute of silence, then Ned said,—

"I've been choosing my profession,—I shall be eighteen by-and-by, you know, if I live, and it's high time, I think, seeing how many years of study it takes to fit one for work. You made choice of yours a long, long time ago."

A little chill of disappointment crept into Noll's heart at this. He had imagined something else. But he exclaimed, eagerly enough,—

"What are you going to be?" having a strong presentiment that the ambitious merchant had marked out an ambitious future for his son.

Ned hesitated, the faint colour brightening his face as, slowly lifting his eyes until they met Noll's, he said,—

"One of God's ministers."

Mr. Thorn, who was looking over the evening's papers and letters, became conscious of a sudden silence in the conversation that had been going on at the farther end of the room, and looked up to see what was the matter. But there was nothing in the appearance of the two figures sitting there to warrant his keeping his eyes long from his letters. Noll sat motionless and silent. There was a strange swimming before his eyes; his tongue was strangely tied. For a few minutes that seemed almost endless he could not find a word to say, and Ned was the first to speak.

"Are you then so surprised?" he asked.

"No—yes—well, both together. I can't tell you what I think. O Ned!"

He took up his friend's hand and pressed it warmly between both of his own, in lieu of saying more. But after a minute of silence he burst out in a tone of self-reproach,—

"I'm always wronging you. I don't know that I ever imagined you would choose that. I thought there were so many other tempting ways open to you—so many to dazzle—that—

that,—O Ned, forgive me! I never understood you."

Something of the old merriness shone in Ned's eyes as he replied,—

"You *do* need my forgiveness very much. When I look back and remember all that I have been, and what cause you've had to imagine everything good of me, I doubt whether I'd better forgive you."

Noll suddenly looked out of the window into the darkness. Ned, his old merry, reckless, pleasure-loving friend, forsaking the bright, tempting honours for which his wealth and station opened easy way, to become a humble servant of Christ! Why, somehow it drove the tears into his eyes and took away his power to speak. He never had half fathomed the depths of Ned's changed heart.

"Ned," said he earnestly, turning around with the tears glimmering on his lashes, "there's no need of saying such a poor thing as 'I'm glad.' You know how I feel. It seems to me that God has made these days the very happiest of my life. It don't seem as if my cup *could* hold any more."

Here Mr. Thorn called to his son for some little attention; and Noll watched the shapely figure of his friend as it moved hither and thither, thinking that it had all come right at last, and that God had more than answered his prayers. When Ned came back to the window, Noll asked,—

"What did your father say? Was he willing?" knowing that this could be no choice of the merchant's.

"When I told him what I wished to be, he shook his head at first, and said he wanted me to be something greater than a minister," replied Ned. "But I think father's heart is softer since he was sick; for when I asked him what work could be greater than living and working for others for Christ's sake, he said, 'Do as you think best, Ned;' and I decided as I longed to."

Noll had nothing to say. God had come wonderfully near to his friend, it seemed to him.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

AT Culm Rock, nearly a year from the events in the last chapter, the *Gull* came to anchor one night beside the little wharf, bringing an unusual number of passengers. The sun was down, but over Rock and sea lay the calm, clear light of the after-glow. In the far, dim distance of south and east, the mysterious shadows of twilight were falling, just as they fell one long-ago evening, when a disappointed, homesick lad took his way up the sand to the grim, forbidding old stone house. The lad—though he can hardly be called lad any longer—thinks of it all as he steps out on the familiar little wharf, followed by his friends. There are the Thorns—tall, handsome, noble-faced son, and invalid father—and Dr. Baill,

involuntarily casting his eyes up to the cliff where he buried his friend, as he steps ashore. The grave, keen-eyed man, taking in at one long look the strangeness of the picture before him—weird gloom and light up among the cliffs, the long, golden strip of shore, quaint, patched, little huddle of houses, and the quainter figures coming out of them—can be no other than the professor. With him are Atkins, and lame, thin-faced Kepler, whom Noll has invited to spend vacation at Culm Rock. Last of all comes Hagar, with one of her own kin and colour to assist in the duties which are getting to be too many and onerous for Hagar's years. Word had been sent of their coming, in order that the stone house might be ready for guests; and as Noll stepped down upon the sand, Henry Fields met him with a warm welcome, and a look of surprise at finding how much two years had added to his figure. Close behind the teacher was Dirk's eager face, and a group of rough-featured fishermen, waiting for their turn to take their benefactor's hand.

"You can see how it is," said Atkins, as Kepler and he stood by the wharf's edge look-

ing on ; “everybody’s rejoiced to see him. They haven’t got eyes nor ears for anybody else. I don’t know but if you should shipwreck Noll Trafford upon some barbarous shore, the savages would come running down to shake hands with him.”

“These fish-folk have reason enough for liking him,” said Kepler ; “they’d be brutes if they didn’t.”

A little way from the group of women and children that had come down upon the sand, stood a solitary figure that made Noll’s heart give two or three quick beats as his eyes rested upon it. He looked a minute intently, but the shadows lay so thick that way that he could decide upon nothing with certainty. Turning to Henry Fields, he said,—

“Who is that out yonder, a little in the shadow ? I’m almost certain it is some one whom I know.”

“That is hardly possible,” said the teacher. “You see the wreck out yonder ?”—pointing to a black object far out on the calm bosom of the sea, from which a slant mast tapered against the rosy sky—“it was a foreign vessel. The

figure you see in the shadow was the only life that came ashore ; and how he was saved is a mystery. Since then he has had no opportunity of going to the port he wishes to reach."

"His name?" said Noll quickly.

"Floyd," answered the teacher.

Here Ned came up to shake hands with his old acquaintance, the schoolmaster, and pointing, Noll said,—

"Look over yonder, Ned, and see whom the sea has thrown upon our hospitality."

Ned looked, but failed to recognize the half-hidden figure.

"Who is it?" he said in some wonder.

"Harold Floyd," said Noll.

Ned started as if he had heard a serpent hiss, and a strange look came into his handsome face—a look that Noll did not like to see. But it lingered for only a minute, and then he said,—

"I don't believe we had better see him to-night ; at any rate, I had rather not."

"Well," assented Noll. "And now we must see about getting our company home. Dirk will take part of the baggage and your father

around in the boat, and perhaps we can get some one to carry Hagar too. Of course the rest of us will prefer to walk."

After a little delay, but before the light had quite died from land and sea, the party on foot started up the shore for the stone house. It was a rather quiet walk, considering how many there were in the party; for old memories kept Noll still, and there was something in the far, vast expanse of sea, with its solemn voice and lights and shadows, that disinclined the others to chatter. But when at last they came into the cheerful light that streamed down the sand from the windows of the stone house, and Noll, rousing from his silence, said merrily, "Welcome to my stone fortress, gentlemen!" there was a good deal of talk, laughter, and exclamation, and a pleasant stir and bustle as they gathered on the piazza.

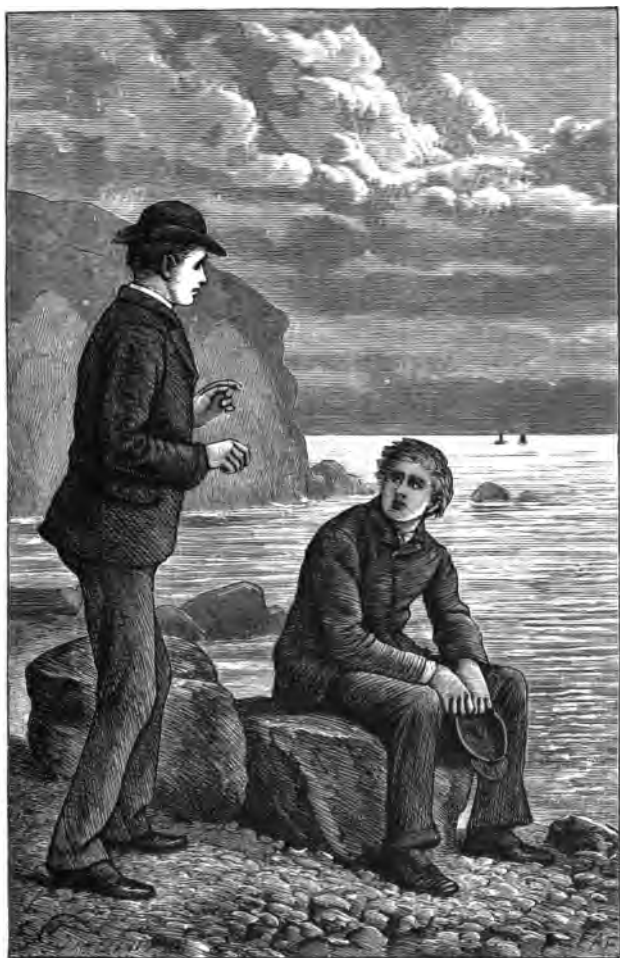
"I declare," said Atkins, pausing to rest as they brought the trunks and baggage up from the boat, and turning his face toward the mysterious gleam of the sea through the dusk, "this is the most wonderful place I ever saw. Who would have thought we could find such

a strange, ancient bit of nature, only a day's sail from Hastings?—Noll Trafford, we shall have to thank you for a new sensation; for this little world of yours is like nothing else I ever saw.”

“It looks as though we might make some discoveries among those great cliffs,” said Kepler: “I'd like to try it to-morrow.”

It appeared that there were others of the same mind, for bright and early after breakfast the next morning, the professor and his pupils were off over the rocks, leaving those uninterested in geology at home.

About ten o'clock Ned Thorn came down from the chamber where he had been unpacking some of the articles that had been brought down from Hastings to make their visit comfortable, and finding that his father and Dr. Baill were having a chat by themselves in the library, he was tempted by the bright sunshine and loveliness of the day to take a walk along the shore over which Noll and he had raced so many times. Perhaps, too, there was a faint, half-formed determination in his heart to go and see Harold. At any rate, the path he



NED'S MEETING WITH HAROLD.

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took led him slowly toward Culm village; very slowly, too, he loitered so long over the great bunches of kelp and heaps of shining pebbles, thinking of what merry times Noll and he had had on that long-ago memorable summer; and straying hither and thither, now on the sand, now on the rocks, till at last he came to a pause at the edge of a great boulder poised on the torn and slanted cliff. Here, looking over his shoulder down into the sheltered bit of sand below, he saw Harold idly sitting in the sunshine. For a minute the struggle of the previous evening was endured again; then he turned and took a calm look at his treacherous friend. Harold had wronged and robbed him; but what right had he, who was trying to live like his Master, to cherish hatred and bitterness? He stepped over the edge of the rock, and carefully and softly made his way down.

Harold was sitting with his back toward the cliff, and did not turn till Ned's feet crunched the pebbles close beside him. They looked full at each other for two or three seconds, then Ned held out his hand, say-

ing, in the genial, friendly tone that won everybody,—

“You’re looking finely, Harold, and I’m glad to see you.”

Harold had grown a good deal, and the experiences of his changeful life had served to make him much older in appearance than in reality. His countenance retained the old expression of *sang-froid* and careless good-humour; but somehow Ned’s words and manner were too much for it. The red colour of shame burned in his cheeks, he started up as if to run away, and when, after a moment of wavering, he sat down on the sand again, it was to turn his back toward the new-comer, and stare sullenly at the cliff.

“Why,” said Ned pleasantly, “haven’t you even a word for me? It’s a long time since we’ve met.”

“I wish it had been a good deal longer!” said Harold sullenly. “If it hadn’t been for that plaguy wreck, I’d never got in your power, I can tell you.”

“My power!” Ned laughed in the old hearty, merry way, that suddenly conjured up a hun-

dred remembrances for Harold. "Why, what do you think I came down here on the sand for?"

"To make me trouble, I suppose," said Harold, kicking hard at the pebbles. "You may do what you like; there can't be anything worse than what I've been through!"

Ned sat down, bound to conquer this stubborn heart.

"What have you been through, Hal?" he asked sympathizingly.

Hal! The name belonged to days which the evil-doer, stirring his feet uneasily in the sand, remembered with pleasure. He had not heard such a pleasant sound for many a month. Turning around to Ned he exclaimed, almost fiercely,—

"I've been through everything that's bad. I've been starved and ill-treated, and almost dead with the fever; and, last of all, the sea threw me up here. Nothing kills me, somehow. When I heard that a lot of you were coming down from Hastings, and that this dismal place belonged to Noll Trafford, I wished I'd gone to the bottom with the others."

Ned took no notice of this exclamation, but said,—

“I suppose you would like to leave Culm Rock.”

“I’d exchange for any decent prison in the world,” said Harold.

“How would you like to go back to Hastings once more? There is work enough for every one, and I will help you.”

Harold stared straight into Ned’s face for two long, silent minutes.

“Do you mean that?” he cried out at last, his cheeks turning a little pale at the intensity of his new hope.

“Certainly; why should I deceive you?” said Ned.

Harold jumped up, shook his shoulders as if he were shaking off the fetters of a hateful bondage, and looked at the sea for a moment with a face that was really serious.

“I came down here this morning discouraged,” he said, “and thinking that before noon there would be one less vagabond in the world;—and there would have been if you hadn’t found me. You know what a poor scamp

you've robbed the sea of, and I can't see why you should do it; but, I tell you, I'll take a new turn now. I'll work for you like a dog—I'll do anything you say. You're the only person that ever cared three cents whether I went to the bad or not; and I'll show you I can be grateful for it."

He set his teeth firmly together and stood up erect.

"If you'll try to make something better of your life, Hal," said Ned, "that will give me greater pleasure than anything else. If you go back with me, there will be a host of old habits to forsake. Can you do it?"

"I can try," said Harold; "you can't expect to transform a fellow like me in an instant. But I'll fight for something better, like death!—I tell you I will!"

Ned's heart beat warm and glad. What if he had not come down from the cliff? What if, looking down upon this stranded, forsaken, erring human brother, he had turned, like the priest and the Levite, and gone another way? At whose door would the death of the despairing, discouraged soul have been laid?

Ned suddenly remembered that it was past noon, and that friends at the stone house would be wondering at his absence.

"I must go back now, Harold," he said, getting up; "I've been gone from the house a long time. I'll see you again before long; and whenever you like, come around to the stone house and see me."

Harold shook his head.

"It's no place for me there," he said; "I know what a welcome I should get. They'd none of them think me fit to put their feet on."

"Now you are wronging them all," said Ned, "and the sooner you come and see them the better. You know Noll Trafford too well to cast any such doubt upon him."

"How could I tell but what he had changed?" said Harold, following Ned as he took the homeward path; "you've both grown to be such tall, handsome fellows, that I hardly knew you at first. The world goes easy with both of you."

"As for that," said Ned, "I think Noll Trafford is one of the hardest workers I ever saw. He's never idle. There's always some

one to be helped and comforted, besides all the great work of his own he has to do. Next year he will graduate at the university—one of the deepest, brightest scholars that ever studied there. Some day he will be in one of the great professorships, or perhaps at the head of the university itself.”

“And you,” said Harold,—“what are you doing?”

“At work,” said Ned, after a moment’s pause; “and if I live to finish my studies, I mean to be a minister.”

Harold stopped short, and not a sound broke the silence save the slow, steady swell of the tide.

“Well,” said he, drawing a long breath, “if you always preach as good sermons as the one you’ve preached to-day, it’s certain that somebody’ll be better for your preaching.”

They went on a little way further, till the bend of the shore revealed the stone house; then Harold turned back, saying, as Ned gave him his hand,—

“Don’t quite forget me when you get back to all those people. Just give me a chance to

show that I mean to hang to what I've promised till the last."

Ned hurried homeward to find that the geologists had not returned, and that his father and Dr. Baill had had dinner, and were sitting in the sunshine of the piazza.

"My son," said the father, "we searched the house over for you, but were obliged to eat dinner without you after all."

"I started toward Culm and met Harold Floyd," said Ned: "that was how I came to forget myself and stay so long."

"Harold Floyd!"

Mr. Thorn's eyes opened wide, and his hands nervously clasped themselves together.

"You can trust me now, father?" said Ned, with a smile. "Harold has met a great many misfortunes since I ran away with him, and I want to give him a help up. I offered to get him away from here and give him a chance to begin again at Hastings, and he accepted it. I mean that my influence shall be the stronger this time.—Dr. Baill, won't you help too? I mean to get every one of our party to make me that promise before we go back."

"Go and get your dinner," said Dr. Baill, "and then I will tell you."

Ned went in, and the doctor exclaimed,—

"Oh, these boys! Do you see what lives are being lived in our very midst, Thorn? Nothing dim, far-off, unreal, but every-day, practical Christianity,—right before our eyes, sir. I wonder if we can't all find it in our hearts to forgive Harold Floyd, after what we've just heard?"

The days of this vacation at Culm Rock were short by reason of the happiness which everybody found in them. The geologists had enough to keep them busy and enthusiastic, and the remainder of the party found the hours just as fleeting in following their less active enjoyments. There were excursions by boat, fishing-parties, toilsome climbs to Wind Cliff to see the sun set, rambles of a whole day's length upon the shore, with dinner under the shadow of a rock or in the pine woods, and neither night nor day brought them anything to mar their pleasure. Atkins said it was just the place to spend a long, studious life, with a great room full of books for friends,

and wished such a happy lot were his ; Kepler thought it was too mysterious and shadowy to spend a happy life-time in ; the professor said the stone house had not enough sunshine. But as the end of vacation drew near, there were none quite willing or ready to go back to the city so soon, unless it was Harold Floyd. But as necessity compelled, the pictures came down from the walls, the books were repacked, the minerals and shells and mosses, of which there were no small quantities, found their way into the boxes prepared for them ; and the rooms of the stone house began to look bare and forlorn again.

It was on the last afternoon of their stay that the party, even including the invalid, Mr. Thorn, had strolled far along the shore toward Culm village, tempted by the sunshine of the fair October afternoon. They came to a pause in their walk, and, loath to go back to their half-dismantled house so soon, seated themselves upon the dry, moss-covered rocks, against which the lazy incoming tide lapped. Perhaps there had been no fairer afternoon than this since they landed from the *Gull*. There

was no grand glory of painted autumn woods, nor lines of bronzed magnificent hills with which the mainland was glowing; but in the clefts and hollows of the brown cliffs the gold and purple light trembled in such exquisite shades,—afar upon the sea there wavered such tender, delicate mists of colour dying in the pure emerald of the nearer waves,—that they were at a loss to decide whether inland or shore held the fairer beauty.

“I think the picture would be perfect, but for that ugly, jagged wreck with all its suggestions, lying out yonder in the calm water,” said the doctor, turning his eyes from the sea to his friends.

“O doctor,” spoke up Atkins, “that is just what makes the scene picturesque. It would be too sweet and tame but for that hint of storm and struggle out there.”

“How can you say that?” exclaimed Kepler: “I would rather never look at anything picturesque if it must be gained through so much terror and sorrow.”

“That is what I think,” said Ned: “those broken timbers, rocking with the tide, are the

monument of too many silent, suddenly-stilled hearts, to make the sight a pleasant one."

"Perhaps," said Noll, whose own eyes had long been on the swaying wreck, "Harold can give a better opinion than any of us, since he is the only soul whom the sea spared."

"The most I know or think about it is that she was a plaguy rotten old thing," said Harold, "and I'll never set foot on such another."

They laughed some at this, and the doctor said:

"The professor has not spoken yet. Let us hear what he has to say."

"If this picture were to be copied," said the professor, "I should have the wreck left in; not for beauty, nor for what you call picturesqueness, but because I think it would do me good to look at it sometimes, to make me humble. There has been a wreck in my life,"—(his voice grew a little unsteady); "and though a good Master led me to the shore through the tempest, the ruins are there yet,—so great I can never cover them up,—so wide I can never leave them out of my picture when I look at it. But some of our friends here, like this son of mine," laying a hand affectionately upon Noll's

shoulder, "began to serve their Master when they were young, and their picture should have the wreck left out. It is so much better to have no wreck, to begin young and have the picture without its gloomy part and the signs of tempest; that is what I try to make my boys at school understand. And Atkins, my dear friend, I have hope you will not love the bad part so much as to have a wreck in your picture when it is all finished. I have hope that you will find Help to make it all lovely and bright, as this would be with the broken ship left out. Now, my friend, you will believe your poor old professor, who has been shipwrecked himself?"

Atkins turned a suddenly wistful face toward the sea, and the others sat silent and thoughtful; even Harold, looking at the black and broken timbers of the wreck, through which the purple tide rippled, thought he would like to steer his own bark so clear of shipwreck and disaster that at last it might safely float into the calm haven of Heaven.

There are those for whom even a sequel is not enough. They would fain lift the curtain that hangs over the Beyond, even though the author has resolved it shall rise no more. For the benefit of such persons these paragraphs are appended:—

At Hastings University there is still a quiet little German professor whose hair is getting white and step halting. Yet, in spite of his infirmities, a proposal to remove him would be met with indignation. Everybody loves Professor Bayler. His hand is always ready to help up those who have tripped and fallen, and numberless young men have reason to bless him. He is not so famous as he would have been if the great work of his life had seen the light, and when he rests from his labours perhaps the busy world will hardly take notice; but what is this to a man who is patiently waiting for the loving hands of his Lord to crown him, and to hear at the gate of Heaven the voice of a fair-haired lad say, "Dear, dear father!"

Ned Thorn's life more than fulfils the promise which younger years gave; and he has a little Ned of his own.

Harold's wanderings are for ever ended.

Atkins is a college professor; and Kepler has not been too lame to climb to a good standing in his profession.

To Noll Trafford the years have brought no great change, save that, as the head of the University, he finds greater opportunities for making others better and happier; and to brighten, with the influence of his broad, noble, Christian life, scores of young hearts with whom he daily comes in contact. His name, also, through some gradual, mysterious process, has grown from Noll to Oliver. Culm Rock and its people are still as much in his heart as ever, though the sea has taken the lives of many who once shared its barrenness with him. The stone house is occupied in the summer; but Hagar no longer presides in its little kitchen. "S'pects Canaan ain't fur off for dis ole woman," is a prophecy which has been fulfilled.

THE END.

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